



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



Durysa
NED





44.9209

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

NINA LARREY DURYEA

1911



10/22/11

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

1

BY (S. M. L.)
NINA LARREY DURYEA
AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABBLERS,"
"THE VOICE UNHEARD," ETC.



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

2

28711A

Copyright, 1916,
By GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

CENTRAL RESERVE



A circular stamp is located in the lower right quadrant of the page. The words "CENTRAL RESERVE" are printed in a bold, sans-serif font across the top of the circle. Below this text are several horizontal lines, some of which are solid and others dashed. The bottom half of the circle contains faint, illegible text, possibly a date or a reference number. The entire stamp is surrounded by a circular border of small dots.

46035

2
D

TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY MOTHER



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. The Alarm	11
II. The Princess Becomes the Means to an End . . .	27
III. The Spider and the Fly	51
IV. The Tryst	62
V. "The Idea"	78
VI. The Duke Hears a Truth	98
VII. The Duke's Education	110
VIII. Mrs. Bradish "Arrives"	143
IX. A Midnight Adventure	171
X. The Tango	181
XI. Mrs. Morely Makes a Discovery	205
XII. A Change of Scene	228
XIII. Turtles	249
XIV. The Spider	267
XV. The Reward of Virtue	309





A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON



MADE IN
CITY OF NEW YORK

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

CHAPTER I: THE ALARM

JEHAN DE REIZET ran down the wide, stone steps leading from the perron to the court of his cousin's house in the Faubourg St. Honoré, aware that the two lackeys watched him curiously from the open door. They had doubtless heard the Duke's voice through that silent house, where suavity and wit were more in harmony with its stately beauty than rancorous argument.

The path of yellow light in which Reizet walked was suddenly blotted out as the great doors closed behind him. A lamp burned dimly under the arch leading to the street, and the uniformed concierge opened the iron gates emblazoned with the Petrinac Arms with a friendly smile, not born of an expected tip, but sympathetic interest.

It was midnight and the pavement was slimy with mud. A rim of moon hung in a watery sky above the line of mansard roofs, and the street, congested during the day by traffic, was now so deserted and silent, that the young man's footsteps echoed with exaggerated sound.

Reizet, immersed in unpleasant thoughts, felt nevertheless the soothing influence of that profound peace which broods over Paris at such an hour. He sensed the repose of myriad

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

weary brains and bodies, relaxed in unconsciousness of past strivings, and of future effort; for in no city of the world is life so ardent, or memory so replete with human endeavour.

Turning to the left, Reizet found himself in the Rue St. Roche, in the shadow of the ancient church. The narrow, alley-like thoroughfare stretched before him to the Avenue de l'Opera as quiet as a country lane, redolent of sunless spaces and age. Suddenly from the pitchy darkness of an entrance to an apartment house darted four figures. They hurtled by Reizet, seemingly unaware of his presence, fleeing as before an enemy, yet pursued by no one. Reizet stood rooted to the pavement with astonishment as they sped down the narrow footway, one behind another. As they flew through the circle of light from a street-lamp, he discerned that one of them was a chef in white cap and apron, who out-distanced a puffing concierge, a woman in an abbreviated red petticoat, and lastly a smart, feminine figure in discreet black, who ran with ponderous dignity, holding her skirts high above neat ankles and revealing several inches of white cotton hosiery. All four turned the corner, and darkness and sudden, complete silence swallowed them.

Reizet still remained passive, wondering why their flying feet made no further sound on the stone flagging, for, though out of sight, they were not beyond hearing, and the momentary silence made itself uncannily felt.

Then suddenly their voices rose; high, violent, a note of terror mingling with incoherent words. Reizet wondered what deed of violence was being done, and, grasping his heavy walking-stick, he also sped round the corner, to find himself in the midst of four gesticulating, palpitating figures grouped about an iron post whereon was stationed the fire-alarm box. The lady in the red flannel petticoat was speaking, waving both hands in the face of the concierge.

"Nay, nay!" she cried. "It is not I who, by dying, will give

THE ALARM

thee liberty to take another wife to thy bosom. Those sleepers yonder may all roast in their beds before I shall invite Death to——”

The concierge waggled an empurpled visage close to hers. “Nor will I oblige thee by departing from this world,” he replied. “Doubtless thou hast an eye on one younger, yet less worthy.” He turned to the chef: “It is you, Phillippe, who must break the glass and sound the alarm, for your mistresses can easily replace you, and——”

Reizet felt a light touch on his arm and turned, to find the neat figure in discreet black at his elbow, her comely face with its faint moustache alert and self-possessed beneath round hat and veil.

“Monsieur will pardon me? Monsieur perhaps does not care longer to live?” she asked hopefully.

Jehan stared at her in astonished indignation. “But I most assuredly do wish to live, and intend to do so,” he replied emphatically, while the others remained agape.

“Alas! What, then, shall be done?” she cried helplessly.

“It means death to him who breaks glass on Saint Landri’s Day, before the year is out. Yet yonder house burns while we stand idle.”

“Yes, yes! The house burns!” they wailed in chorus, in different keys of hysterical despair. “Even now it burns, roasting those who are not prepared to face the fires of Hell, yet Life is sweet and who will break the glass?”

Light dawned on Reizet’s bewildered brain as he recalled the superstition. “Idiots!” he cried; and, lifting his stick, shattered the glass and sounded the alarm, while the lady in black muttered a prayer for his soul, soon to depart to celestial reward. Then the quartette turned and fled from whence they had come, Jehan following. Before the house from whence they had issued they paused. All was dark and still, but the fat concierge pointed to a demure stream of smoke

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

which issued from a dormer window high above neighbouring roofs with stealthy menace.

"Voilà!" he cried. "Tarry not. There is work to be done." Without more ado the four, followed by Jehan, scurried within the dark archway and up the narrow stair faintly illumined by night-wicks floating in glasses filled with oil. As they went they shouted. In a moment the tranquillity of that sleeping house was a bedlam of uproar and confusion. Doors were banged by desperate fists: bells pealed; cries resounded. Doors were flung wide, revealing dishevelled heads and interiors of elegance or poverty as they mounted. Cries echoed from the street below, with the sound of hurrying feet, and windows were flung open to the crash of splintering glass and falling objects. Jehan wondered how long before the engine would appear, as an old woman came trembling on to the landing, clutched at the rail, and moaned with helpless terror. Jehan swept her into his strong arms and carried her to the street. A middle-aged gentleman in a white night-shirt and tasselled cap appeared, carrying a lighted candle carefully, as a precious possession to be saved at all costs, which he tenderly set in a corner opposite, out of harm's way. A lady with brazen hair, clad in a pink silk peignoir, threw strangling arms about Reizet's neck, clamoured for protection and clung there, like a limpet to a rock. From a third-story window the discreet person in black was discovered throwing out table silver, fine clothing and pictures with an energetic hand. Meanwhile the smoke continued to curl lazily skyward. Just then the rattling thunder of the engine was heard, and a roar of welcome rose as gendarmes cleared a space, pressing back the throng into a solid wall. Ladders were placed and up these nimble firemen swarmed. From the main entrance there suddenly was ejected a gesticulating youth, long-haired, his face distorted with fury. In vain he endeavoured to make himself heard above the babel of his would-be rescuers' voices. In one hand

THE ALARM

he clutched a bundle of papers, which he violently waved in the faces of those who thrust him forth. At last his shrill voice made itself heard and suddenly silence fell on the uproar as some word passed from lip to lip. Consternation, fright became plain upon the faces of his listeners.

Just at that moment Jehan again felt a touch on his arm. Again the woman was at his elbow, her face, white with exhaustion and begrimed from her exertions, wore an enigmatical expression. She stood on tiptoe and whispered with agitation into Jehan's ear: "Monsieur, there is a time for courage and a time for discretion. May I suggest that this is the moment for the latter, and that an immediate departure from this painful scene is advisable?"

Her hand was firmly on his and, as though hypnotised, Jehan was led out of the crowd, which now mysteriously appeared to be stirred by the same strange spirit of wrath which had driven the long-haired youth to frenzy. Jehan and his escort gained a quiet street, she pantingly insistent on haste; he passive under her strenuous guidance. There she suddenly paused, fell back against the wall of a house and covered her face with her hands with a sound of convulsive sobbing.

Reizet was a brave man, but the present scene appalled him. What was one to do, at one in the morning, with a woman who, in tears and disordered attire, clung to a wall, wordless and distraught? He looked this way and that, hoping for some sort of succour, though when a night-hawk cabby passed a distant corner, Jehan trembled at his possible approach. He ventured to speak soothingly and to even lay a sympathetic hand on her convulsed shoulder. She turned and clung to his hand, revealing her face. It was convulsed with laughter.

Jehan started back in disgusted astonishment, as she leaned to him. "Oh! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" she gasped between breaths. "Think not that I am mad, Monsieur. What a situation! There was no fire! The house did not burn! That

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

smoke was only from the poor youth's love letters, which he was burning in his garret which had no chimney. To think of those tender sentiments going out that window in smoke, and causing such havoc! The engine—the poor gentleman in his night-shirt and the fine raiment I threw from the chapter's window. Never again may I visit in that house. They would tear me limb from limb."

Fresh laughter shook her, in which Jehan now joined somewhat ruefully, with apprehensive glances up and down the street, for was it not he who had sounded the alarm? The minions of the law might at any moment drag him to judgment. He spoke sternly:

"Madame, it is now morning, and, as you said, there is a time for all things, and the present is not seemly for mirth. I desire to spend the rest of this eventful night in my bed, and doubtless you desire to spend it in yours. May I call you a cab?"

She sobered with incredible promptitude: adjusted her hat and veil and appeared to draw over her whole personality a perfect dignity and self-possession. "Certainly, if Monsieur will be so kind."

They moved, side-by-side, along the empty street. She was now silent, and Jehan saw that her face was white and tired, and he felt stricken with remorse. She had worked unselfishly in what she had deemed a righteous cause, and doubtless reaction had left her hungry and exhausted.

"There seems to be a paucity of cabs," he remarked. "You must be in need of food as well as rest. If there was only a restaurant near——"

She brightened at the suggestion. "But there is, Monsieur. The second corner on the right. There, snails à la Bergoise are a marvel. Perhaps Monsieur has enjoyed them there? Ah! we are here."

They entered a minute restaurant whose floor was elaborately

THE ALARM

covered with sawdust in geometrical designs. Marble-topped tables stood before leather-covered divans, above which were mirrors decorated with garlands of pink tissue-paper roses. Behind the high desk a rotund proprietor came to life and an attenuated garçon fluttered forward, waving his serviette with hospitality.

Jehan, also tired and hungry, allowed his guest to order what she willed, and a moment later found himself opposite her with a plate of snails before him, from which he turned a shrinking eye. Before partaking of her favourite dish, however, she brought forth from her reticule a silver vanity box and, with aplomb, powdered her nose and adjusted straying locks, while discoursing with agreeability to him and also to the garçon, who evidently regarded her as a person of importance. Jehan began to find a fresh interest in his adventure, and so expressed himself to his guest.

"Monsieur finds this droll?" she asked. "Life would indeed be dull were it not for such reliefs from our responsibilities. Mine ended at ten last evening, and, alas! recommence in the morning at eight." She sighed and dallied with the mustard pot.

"You speak of responsibilities," replied Jehan politely. "Might I venture to enquire their nature?"

She hesitated, her eyes on the mirrored profile of her host. It was young, strong, clean-cut and inspired confidence. Framed thus in pink-paper roses, it had an odd dignity by very contrast, and she wondered as to his identity. Sleek brown hair lay against a head which denoted intellectual capacities. Grey eyes, keen yet grave, held a sobriety belying the humour which lurked about a somewhat ascetic mouth. But distinction breathed from every line of the face and tall, lean frame in its somewhat demodé evening dress. Her feminine breast warmed at the thought of this situation so fraught with adventure. She sighed delicately.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Mine is the greatest of responsibilities," she said, "that a woman of sensibility can have: the charge of a young and beautiful girl. I am, Monsieur, the *dame de compagnie* of such an one: an angel, though she comes from that *pays sauvage* across the seas called America. But no savage is she, having been educated at the Convent of the Sacre Cœur here in Paris and has thus acquired all graces and accomplishments. I am her protector—her dragon of the watchful eye. I represent to her—the proprieties."

Reizet's quizzical smile brought her tongue to a standstill. "Ah!" said he. "Could she but see you now. Could she know of this evening's adventures, Madame."

She stared at him with terror dawning in her black eyes. "Is it possible that Monsieur knows of whom I speak—that he would inform——?"

"Be reassured. I have no more idea of her identity than I have of yours, Madame. Nor do I desire to know—hers, though I confess to an interest as to your own. For Americans I have no taste. I have never known but one whom I would care to meet again."

"And she——?"

"Is sixty."

"Helas!"

"Not at all. These Americans who are permeating our life are a pest. They upset our standards of living by their vulgar extravagance. They are heartless and ambitious for worthless things. They are past masters in the art of snobbism, and ignorant of the charm of simplicity. Bah! I detest them and——"

"Monsieur has doubtless suffered from some one of them, that he is thus bitter?"

Reizet pushed back his wine glass, annoyed with himself for this self-betrayal. She doubtless thought him a disappointed suitor for some wealthy being. Well, let her think

THE ALARM

so. They would never meet again, and that the cause of his dislike for Americans arose from far other causes did not concern present circumstances. He rose and beckoned the waiter, and soon they found themselves once more on the pavement, where a passing fiacre was requisitioned. As Reizet was about to hand his guest within, she paused: "Perhaps Monsieur goes toward the Étoile. If so, might I suggest that we go together? I can leave Monsieur where he wishes and proceed alone."

Reizet gave the *coché* directions, squeezed himself in beside her and the door slammed, leaving them in darkness. As a mere matter of precaution, Reizet extracted his scarf-pin and kept his hand on his watch pocket while his companion proceeded to converse with aplomb and intelligence, in nowise embarrassed by the unusual situation. They rolled up the Champs Élysées, where trees stood motionless against the dim sky, while Reizet listened to opinions on the Balkan question, the best method for decreasing flesh, the shocking brutality of American customs officials against aigrettes and the undignified atrocities of the tango. But at the Rond Point, Reizet checked the cab and got out. He held out his hand, into which she placed two black-kidded fingers. "We part to meet no more," she said.

"I pray that it may be otherwise," lied Reizet courteously.

But she shook her head. "No! I go. I disappear; the sea of life reclaims me. Adieu!"

She sank back into the obscurity of the cab, the door closed and Reizet was alone. He crossed the Champs Élysées and struck into the Avenue Montaigne, both glad and sorry that the finale of his adventure had been reached. But as he thus congratulated himself, he saw a cab turn into the street on which the garden of his own house abutted. He paused and gazed after the vanishing vehicle when, to his chagrin, he saw a sombre, alert figure descend, bow ceremoniously to the dis-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

reputable *coché*, and then mount cautiously the steps of a new and splendid house, whose implacable front spoke of restrained riches and arrogant self-assurance. Reizet stood rooted to the pavement, swearing softly in the darkness.

All was explained. "The devil take her!" he said to himself. "It is the house of those rich Americans who insist that I sell them my land and my home upon it that they may tear it down and add my garden to theirs. She—represents the proprieties to those who have none. And her 'angel.' The minx whose mother thought that money could buy everything: even the ancient roof which has sheltered Reizets for four hundred years. Well, they shall learn that all their subtle bullying and bribery will not make me part with a rood of any land. Rather comparative poverty founded on respect for tradition. Drat 'em; mother, daughter and——!" But, no. She, the dragon of the watchful eye, had indeed comported herself with dignity under trying conditions, and should remain exempt from his maledictions.

Reizet passed around the high wall topped with iron spikes, which formed the end of the street, and with a key opened a small wooden door set between stone pillars. Softly closing it, he found himself within a dim garden, sordid realities left behind.

He drew a deep breath and gazed about his domain as though it had been lost and was now regained. He felt that his encounter with the employee of his neighbouring enemy had in some way endangered his peace and security, and made a breach in the wall of his antagonism. The mistress of that blatant palace and her daughter he had never seen, but lawyers had begged, covertly threatened and harassed him at their bidding, with an arrogant belief in the power of their money to bend his will to their pleasure. This surety in the efficacy of wealth roused his antagonism, for it represented to him that new force which modern France was growing to wor-

THE ALARM

ship; in fact, did worship, bowing down before the golden idol, forgetful of pride of race and what it obligated. His beloved Paris, once the shrine of Art, chivalry and high aspirations, was now overrun with a class which filled its streets with their automobiles, and ancient palaces with irresponsible and ignorant grass-widows, whose greatest ambition appeared to be the presence of a Grand Duke at their table in the Ritz restaurant and the most conspicuous toilette at the races. Their hunt for a titled husband was frankly evident, and his contempt for the huntresses was equalled by his derision of those men of his own class who espoused vulgarity for the sake of cash.

From where Reizet stood he glimpsed the white façade of that offending palace above the lilacs with wrathful eyes. Aside from his own disinclination to part with what had been the home of his family for centuries, there lay another, deeper reason which he had never voiced during the many irritating interviews with his lawyers and his cousin, the Duke de Petrinac. The latter, who saw only amelioration of straitened finances, considered Reizet an obstinate fool and told him so repeatedly in forcible language; indeed, that very evening had said that Reizet's selfishness in thus considering only his own wilful and unreasoning prejudices was a wrong to those dependent upon him. Reizet had kept silence, for what use was there to give reasons of sentiment to one whose existence had been one long triumph of unprincipled egotism? No! He could not tell Paul de Petrinac that it was regard for those dependent upon him which was the prime factor in his refusal to move out of that beloved home.

He thought of his two old aunts now asleep within, and recalled their frightened eyes when he had told them of the proposed change from poetic and accustomed surroundings to a modern flat illumined by electricity and the luxury of a porcelain bath. They had shrunk from the idea, shuddering.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

For seventy-six years had they lived within that home and garden, and the outside world seemed to them a wilderness filled with unknown terrors. As their contemporaries had vanished into the unknown, they had withdrawn more and more within themselves. Their habits had become fixed. Their private chapel where their beloved Abbé blessed their bowed heads each Sunday; the shadowed aisles of their cherished garden; the dim beauty of their sparsely furnished salons, where tranquillity brooded in beneficent peace, were all vital to their narrow lives. Could he turn them out into an alien world where modernity would jar their delicate souls? They were like old lace, lavender-scented, only suited to their present environment of mellowed beauty and seclusion.

Long ago the house had been a château, surrounded by its park, where kings had hunted and a gay court dallied with Life. But thrift and the growth of civilisation had little by little brought Paris to its doors, narrowing its precincts to this garden. Something redolent of that past clung to its simplicity. Ancient trees swayed against leaded casements from which had once leaned great ladies and knightly cavaliers. A king had danced the minuet with an English princess where now violets peeped timidly as from a grave of poetic memories.

Reizet sighed and found his way along familiar paths to the low terrace which ran the length of the façade and let himself softly into the house. A candle burned in a silver stick, throwing grotesque shadows on the panelled ceiling of the great hall where a wide staircase curved upwards with its wrought-iron balustrade. Rugs of faded beauty covered the marble flagging, and beyond, one glimpsed formal salons meagrely furnished and hung with portraits.

The house was redolent to him of tender memories. His young mother had here enjoyed her brief happiness, and, dying, had bequeathed to his care her youngest-born son, to whom he had endeavoured to be father and brother in one. The

THE ALARM

moral responsibility entailed by the care and protection of the boy and his twin aunts had sobered his own youth, for with limited means he had endeavoured to preserve to them accustomed luxuries. The high-swung barouche, with its fat horses and white-haired coachman, was still available to take the aunts abroad for their daily airing, and Jack, his small brother, went to Eton and enjoyed all the natural pleasures of his station in life. No one knew the rigid self-denial entailed, or the increasing difficulty of preserving their method of life, but Reizet was rewarded in seeing contented happiness in the three faces he loved. When the aunts should have passed into eternal peace, he and Jack then might rough it together, or part with their home for satisfying cash.

Reizet took the candle and was about to mount the stairs when he spied at the further corner of the table, two decoctions: one, hot mulled wine over a spirit lamp; the other a pot of chamomile tea, likewise heated. He contemplated them with a quizzical smile somewhat ruefully. Aunt Agathe would be wounded if he neglected her potion after his wet evening. Aunt Cecile would fear for his health, did she learn that her wine had failed to be taken. How often since his boyhood had he met such situations and escaped therefrom by adroit expedients. He lifted both and wondered what the mixture of the two would entail, then carefully filled a glass half-in-half with both and drank. With a hand at his waist-line he waited for disastrous results, but only pleasant warmth ensued, and, taking the candle, he softly climbed the stairs.

In the upper hall he paused, regarding with surprise a streak of light beneath the door of his younger brother's room. He tip-toed across and gently turned the handle, then paused with astonishment. Before a table, his back to the door, was a boy, about fourteen, wrapped in a red flannel bathrobe, his fair, tousled head supported in one hand while a pen moved slowly across paper by the light of a solitary candle, burned almost

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

to its socket. Reizet advanced and the boy sprang to his feet, his back to the table, in visible embarrassment.

"Why Jack," said Reizet in English, "what means this burning of the midnight candle? Lessons? Though you are at home because of measles at school, you ought to keep to your regular hours."

The boy hesitated, while his hand went cautiously behind him to a sheet of paper which he warily crumpled into a ball and covered. But watching eyes saw the movement. "No, Jehan," the boy replied truthfully, though flushing to the roots of his curls, "it's not—exactly—lessons. I was—er—just practising—writing."

Jehan turned to an armchair, too tactful to force confidence, and in a trice the ball of paper flew out the window, but not too quick for a seemingly careless glance to note.

"Oh, well," said Reizet, "we've both been playing owls to-night. Haven't you been to sleep at all?"

"With one eye," the boy replied.

They both laughed and Jack perched himself on the arm of the chair, one hand tousling his brother's sleek head. "Just stay a moment, old chap. I so rarely get a chance to talk alone with you, what with the aunts and your affairs. Lately I have felt queer. Is it the spring? In the Bois this morning I just wanted to whoop. Something inside of me seemed bursting, like the buds on the trees, and yet—if I'd been a girl, I believe I'd have—cried. As it was I'd have given anything for a head to punch, but it's not fun licking a French boy. They scratch instead of giving an uppercut."

Reizet regarded his brother with a searching eye. "Have the aunts been dosing you?"

"Yes. They noticed I didn't eat but three chops, and after dinner said I needed calm. They made me read aloud—poetry! Ugh!"

"Certainly pretty hard, that!" laughed Reizet. "But we all

THE ALARM

have our troubles, Jack. Life is a battle, not a cricket match. Well, I'm off. Sleep as late as you like to-morrow morning, and I'll square it with the aunts. Good night, old chap."

When the door had closed behind Reizet, Jack stood in the middle of the room a moment without moving, listening to the careful tread along the polished parquet of the passage, then he ran both hands through his locks with a gesture of relieved dismay. "Whew!" he whispered. "That was a close shave. He almost caught me!" The boy then tiptoed to the window and looked down. On the grass, visible in the pale light of coming dawn, lay the ball of paper, half hidden by a bush. "I'll get it in the morning," he thought, and, blowing out the candle, tumbled into bed.

Some moments later a stealthy figure stole down the stairs and out into the garden to the bush where the paper lay. The anxious elder brother felt for, and acquired the hidden ball of paper, and with an enigmatical expression perused the following lines:

"Adored Angel:

"I can no longer restrain that gushing fount of passion which seethes within my despairing heart. The glimpse of your loveliness flitting like a nymph beneath the trees in the Bois has transformed my life of sluggish toil to one of blissful dreams. Be gracious, O queenly one, and grant me an interview. I've a football match on to-morrow at Alincourt, but I'll be at the fence to-morrow evening at eleven, when my brother Jehan is at the German Embassy. He's not much on sentiment. Bid me not despair. I live but for thee.

"Thy adoring JACK."

"P. S.—Do you like toffee? I have half a box left."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Reizet, having perused this missive with care, crumpled it up once more and replaced it beneath the bush. Then he glanced up at the casement with a smile, in which gravity mingled with amused tenderness. So love was the cause of Jack's mysterious symptoms engendered by the glories of the Bois. "Le Printemps chant," murmured Reizet with a whimsical smile as he returned to his room. Who could the goddess be who thus deprived the boy of rest and caused his loss of appetite even unto three chops? Doubtless some chit in a pigtail and sash at his dancing school. Alas! that no mother could lead the boy through the mazes of adolescence to manhood. "But please God, I'll do my best," thought Reizet, as he, too, at last blew out his spluttering candle.

CHAPTER II: THE PRINCESS BECOMES THE MEANS TO AN END

MRS. BRADISH, having in her youth experienced the annoyance of mediocrity, in middle-age enjoyed the sweets of power. The great house she had built on the Avenue Montaigne was a model of beauty and luxurious comfort, from the vast kitchens walled with white tiles, resplendent with copper and shining nickel, to the lingerie rooms where her maids hung costly toilettes in their scented bags behind cedar doors in ordered elegance. The hall, whose groined, white stone ceiling, arched above a mosaic pavement; the vast salons, rendered intimately cosy by jewel-like screens and palm fronds; deep bergères into which one sank, loth to rise for ever more; the frescoed ceilings where heathen strumpets gambolled amid flowery garlands; the numerous costly bibelots gathered with taste and intelligence; all breathed an atmosphere of sheltered ease and studied luxury.

Mrs. Bradish liked ceremony. Her bedroom, which was one of a suite dedicated to herself, bespoke this. Her bed beneath a canopy which had once sheltered a kingly head, weary of its crown, was on a dais, and furthermore was railed off from the main part of the room by a low grille of carved and gilded wood, through which one passed by a tiny gate to the lady's bedside, quite in the manner of Madame de Pompadour.

From this fine eminence Mrs. Bradish received each morning, in an elaborate dressing-jacket and cap of lace, not cardinals, or great ministers of state to be sure, but her housekeeper, chef, tradespeople from the rue de la Paix, and lastly her secretary,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

with her pad of listed social functions. These persons stood outside the rail at the foot of her bed and received orders, given with the alert decision of an executive mind.

On this September morning her daughter Sylvia entered early, clad in her riding habit. Her charming face, which boasted not one line of classic beauty, glowed like a rose beneath her stiff hat, and her brown hair, flecked with golden lights, was in tendrils about her small ears.

Mrs. Bradish waved a freshly manicured hand. "No! Don't kiss me, dear. My face has just been done, and I am sure you smell horsey. Go and dress and come back at eleven to accompany me to Dreccoll's. I overheard Mrs. Morely say she had a fitting there at half-past eleven, and it will be an excellent opportunity to introduce you, without it appearing premeditated."

The girl smiled and sighed, but her violet eyes lost their sunshiny radiance. "Dear Mother, do let me off. I've enough clothes, goodness knows, and Mrs. Morely will keep. I did so want to run out to La Boulie for a round of golf. Surely we know enough people."

Mrs. Bradish peered through her diamond-studded lorgnette with a puzzled frown. "Dear child, what makes you so odd, I wonder? Sometimes you are surprisingly like your poor father, who found even a church sociable a bore. Of course we know enough people; too many, in fact, of the wrong kind. Haven't you any natural ambition? Self-respect demands the best in everything, from art to social matters; and if you're too lazy to acquire them for yourself, you should be thankful that you have a mother to assist you."

Sylvia tapped the gilded rail with a mutinous smile. "But mother dear, it depends on what you call 'best.' My idea of 'best' isn't yours. You like things. I like thoughts. Your idea of life doesn't suit me, any more than my sports and

THE MEANS TO AN END

prowls in dusty museums suit you. I don't really enjoy going out, at least in Paris. These endless parties of middle-aged women with their bridge and squabbles get on my nerves."

Mrs. Bradish sighed. "Oh! How like your poor, dear father. If we'd followed his ideas we'd still be living in Utica eating pie and wearing linen dusters. Of course, I loved and respected your father, but when he died I felt that my time had come, and you can't say I haven't hustled."

Sylvia gave a spring like an agile boy over the low rail and landed beside the bed. Bending above her mother she touched her fresh lips to the tip of an ear. "You blessed, foolish little mother," she said, "you mustn't think I don't appreciate all you have done and given me, but you hustle so, that sometimes I feel like a grain of popcorn on a hot shovel. Don't you fret. I won't develop into a crank with a taste for low heels and shredded wheat biscuit. I love to dance. I love pretty clothes and a good time, but oh, dear! I am tired of these worthless men and the condescension hidden beneath smiles and blandishments from people who eat our dinners and use our motors as though they were express wagons."

"My child," said Mrs. Bradish, pushing up her be-ribboned pillows, "you will please to remember that every human creature has to put up with condescension from some one, except perhaps the Pope. I have no doubt that Emperor William of Germany resents the Tzar's mightier possessions. They all hustle, just as I do, for something out of reach, till they acquire it; and it's healthy exercise. If civilisation hadn't got a move on, we'd still be cave-dwellers and minus wireless telegraphy. But don't you fancy this American Colony doesn't bore me too at times; but it's a means to an end, and——"

"What end?" asked Sylvia, with an odd expression in her eyes.

"Oh, run along, child. You take one up so. Now run away

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

and dress and be here at eleven sharp. Wear your grey dress with the black hat. It shows off your figure and looks distinguished."

A moment later Mrs. Bradish lay back with a sigh. Through the rose and lace hangings of the windows the distant rumble of rubber-tired motors drifted through the open windows. Beyond lay Paris, gay in spite of autumnal skies, with its artificialities and sombre underworld of tragic pleasures. Mrs. Bradish suddenly felt old and tired, for it was true she had hustled to some purpose.

Mrs. Bradish had been born with a brain of phenomenal acumen.

Her father had been a school teacher of scholarly tastes in the town of Utica, New York, and had given his daughter a sound education and that cultivation which such companionship brings. At eighteen she had married a worthy young man, clerk in a bank, who was more of a poet than an accountant, but so strong was his sense of obligation to duty, that, as years passed, he became finally the first cashier of the bank on a salary of three thousand a year. But their lives were restricted in every sense.

This failed to fret Mr. Bradish, but with the public library of the town ever opening new vistas to his wife's more lively imagination, to her their humdrum existence was sometimes torture. Ambition had been born within her, and with no wider scope than Browning societies or a Dorcas meeting to feed her aspirations, she felt herself smother under petty economies and homely duties.

During her earlier years she hardly knew what she so ardently desired, but observation and experience soon taught her that money was the golden key which unlocked all doors save those of Heaven. Her husband had been contented enough, and asked nothing better of Fate than his wife's affection, the love of his child, apple pie twice a week and

THE MEANS TO AN END

that his carpet slippers might be warmed winter nights before the stove in his study, where he perused the classics by the light of an Argand burner with a green shade. These modest desires had been faithfully fulfilled, and when an elusive microbe poisoned his blood and he succumbed, his wife mourned him sincerely, and denied herself a new sealskin coat to pay for a monument worthy of his virtues.

It was soon after that sad but liberating event that the great IDEA dawned which was to transform her life from comparative poverty to opulence. In her little sewing room, where she fashioned most of her own and Sylvia's garments, there stood on a pine table a dummy of a woman's figure on which she fitted waists. It was a clumsy thing, covered with black cotton and stuffed with excelsior, and its impossibly small waist and Venus-like bust were a source of endless torment, especially when not in use, as no corner seemed adequate to conceal its hideosity. Then the great thought came to her, What an excellent thing it would be if that dummy could collapse. . . . The idea took root and germinated. Ways and means evolved themselves in her active brain. If the shape was made of rubber, with a hole by which an ordinary bicycle pump could inflate it, and a strong covering be made to exactly fit her, and fastened on the rubber shape—presto! her own figure would appear when inflated, exactly duplicated, as air would fill out every contour. A steel rod could be run through it from top to bottom. When not in use, the cap could be removed, the air would escape, and lo! only a rubber shape, a rod and a bit of wood would remain to pack away with ease.

Sylvia, then four years old, still remembered her mother before the kitchen table, curtains closely drawn, cutting out and gumming together that first elastic shape. At last the affair was completed, and an old waist buttoned on. A bicycle

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

pump was requisitioned, and presto! before their eyes stood her mother's own self, duplicated.

That night Mrs. Bradish lay awake for hours beneath the white dimity curtains in the mahogany four-poster, scheming, while snowflakes whirled against rattling window panes. With visions of wealth before her eyes, the bare, little room, the frozen garden plot, their unbeautiful town and all the commonplace crudities of their lives seemed doubly repellent.

In their place she glimpsed distant lands filled with beauty: she saw herself, youth regained, mingling with people whose names she read with envy in society columns of the morning papers; breathing a rarefied atmosphere, where graceful and elegant habits of life lured one toward age with dignified charm. She ran worn fingers along the coarse hamburg edging of her nightdress, thinking of delicate laces, a maid, perfumed baths and soft lights. And Sylvia. . . . Ah! She was the crux of it all. Her youth should flower to perfect bloom amid other surroundings than those of Utica. Nothing should be denied her. All that Europe could give should be hers. Once free of hampering conditions, she would know well how to extract from Life all that would make it a dream of joy to her child.

The next morning Mrs. Bradish called on the president of the bank where Mr. Bradish had formerly been cashier. With the crude model under her arm she was ushered into the sacred inner office and in a trice had her duplicate swelling out before the president's astonished eyes. He seized the idea, saw its value and promised to advance the money for a patent, for its manufacture and advertisement. A local manufacturer of rubber bags began to make them in small quantities, and placed them in the principal shops.

The proud inventor never forgot her trembling joy when, for the first time, she saw "The Idea" demonstrated by a pert young woman at Clark's Emporium, or her vain self-con-

THE MEANS TO AN END

sciousness when in street cars she saw "The Idea" confronting her on posters between "Cherry Pectoral" and "Zozodont."

They sold like hot cakes. In a year the original manufacturer forsook rubber bags and made "The Idea" his sole product.

"The Idea" was clever in contrivance; its method of exploitation also; but the cleverest thing in the whole affair was Mrs. Bradish's own silence. No human being but Sylvia, the bank president, and the Patent Office at Washington knew from whence Mrs. Bradish derived her sudden and ever-increasing wealth. Neighbours questioned in vain. Mrs. Bradish evaded their curiosity with acrobatic skill and left them guessing. Her next brilliant move was to Europe, where she placed Sylvia in the Convent of the Sacre Cœur in Paris among children with historic names and social possibilities, and then hied herself to Cairo.

This last place was decided upon after astute consideration. Having no link whatever with fashionable people either at home or abroad, she knew that the sole means for forming acquaintances was, without ceremony, by personal effort in some centre where the coveted game assembled. She wisely decided to reach Americans through Europeans, and, to that end, she went to Cairo, where she avoided Shephard's Hotel and took an expensive suite at the Savoy, where she lived an apparently retired life. She dressed quietly, entered the public salons rarely, and in the restaurant regarded others with self-contained impertinence through lorgnettes, as though they were a breed of bird with which she desired no acquaintance. Soon English great ladies began to ask who she was through their maids, to whom Mrs. Bradish's own maid tactfully imparted information as to her mistress' vast wealth, social fastidiousness and dislike for new acquaintances. The bait, of course, took. If Mrs. Bradish did not wish to know them, she must be worth knowing, and soon Mrs. Bradish acknowledged

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

pleasant "good mornings" with dignified aloofness, and within three months dined with the Governor General at Government House.

She then began to give small dinners to the elect among the foreign residents, at which American "somebodies" cast envious glances. They assured one another that Mrs. Bradish was "nobody," and informed the Governor General she was a pushing adventuress, but when they finally met her, took pains to be particularly polite. They in turn were asked to these small dinners, one or two at a time, where they met personages they longed to know. Thus Mrs. Bradish arrived at the bourne where she fain would be, and in May left for Paris with letters to half the Diplomatic Corps and invitations to English county houses which would have made the departed husband of her bosom sit upright in his grave.

When Sylvia was sixteen Mrs. Bradish established herself in Paris, where she built herself the above-mentioned palace. She found that the American Colony on the whole was hardly worth while, though containing some charming women whom she desired to know. She met large numbers of neutral-tinted women in expensive clothes, who apparently came from nowhere in particular, and anticipated nothing more than winning a few francs at bridge and eating elaborate food at one another's tables.

Mrs. Bradish was, for some time, mystified as to what actually composed the American Colony, which evaded her like a mirage. She heard it alluded to, read of it, sensed it as a fact, but the hundreds of women she met, many of whom had resided in Paris for years, invariably spoke of the American Colony as though it were some detrimental ghost with which they had no connection. Each and all informed Mrs. Bradish innumerable times: "Oh, yes, I live here, but you must not suppose for a moment we belong to the 'Colony'," until Mrs.

THE MEANS TO AN END

Bradish began to think that to confess herself a member was to admit a lurid past and insignificant present.

There were other little formulas which afforded her food for thought. One was "So sorry to say good-bye, but am dining out." No one ever seemed to dine anywhere but "out," and Mrs. Bradish wondered, until she chanced upon an acquaintance, who an hour before had murmured the formula, dining off poached eggs before her own hearth in cosy *deshabille*. Also, many persons assured her that their intimate friends lived "on the other side of the river." This gave a vague hint of aristocratic affiliations with the Faubourg St. Germain, or with those artistic or scientific Great Ones, who refuse to enter the tents of the Philistines about the Etoile.

Mrs. Bradish cared not a fig for knowing the aristocracy of brains, but she did most earnestly desire to know the bearers of names which figured in history. It had been her code to always acquire the "best," and she fancied it lurked in those silent and urbane streets of the Faubourg, where iron-barred windows were an outward sign of those barriers which she desired to overcome. The unattainable had always attracted Mrs. Bradish irresistibly, and those great, closed portals which sometimes swung open as she passed, revealing solemn façades, orange trees in tubs and enormous beings in livery, had for her an overpowering allure. Their aloofness drew her imagination and roused her combativeness, until a very passion of desire to enter therein possessed her. Those vast palaces with veiled windows and drowsy gardens were a far cry from the pretty salons where she and Sylvia disported themselves. She haloed those unattainable inmates of reticent splendours with delicate charms of person and manner; endowed them with standards of life and thought as lofty as their ceilings, and gave them graces as fine as the scent of age which exhaled from their gardens.

Mrs. Bradish gradually and with unerring skill managed to

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

make the acquaintance of the best of the French which she met in the American society, but these proved unsatisfactory. Beside their titles, many of them questionable, they had little to give in return for the hospitality which they enjoyed as hungry pigeons scramble for crumbs from the rich man's table. The unmarried men usually proposed themselves for Sylvia's hand with celerity, but Mrs. Bradish was shrewd enough to find out that they had but little real position in their own world. On several occasions she and Sylvia had accepted invitations to the houses of these aspirants' relatives, where were assembled ancient and youthful persons, who, beneath their bland manners, eyed Sylvia with appraising eyes. But their air of strained gentility, poor tea, hermetically sealed windows and mussy furnishings were depressing, and Sylvia longed to tell them that she, and not they, condescended to the meeting.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bradish cultivated the best in the American society. With skill she eliminated undesirables, making, of course, enemies in the process, for she was too intelligent to enjoy so idealless a society. The salons she frequented rarely possessed books other than magazines and the latest sensation in novels; but bridge tables made up for that paucity by being much in evidence.

But Mrs. Bradish dearly loved her daughter, and anything which tended toward that daughter's betterment she steadfastly cultivated. It was a passion with her that this young girl should have everything which her own girlhood had lacked, but it never occurred to her that she for whom she toiled might not care a jot for these things, and therein lay the tragedy of which she was becoming dimly aware.

As time passed Sylvia adroitly managed to arrange her own life, giving part of her time to her mother's social exigencies, but retaining a part for the gratification of her own tastes. She joined the clubs of Puteaux and La Boulie, where she played tennis and golf with nice young men, who bored her

THE MEANS TO AN END

to tears in any capacity other than sports. She and Madame Petan, her *dame de compagnie*, dived into the Paris of art, history and romance, which lured the girl's imagination and roused her ideality of life. But she was not happy in her environment, though her mother had failed to discover the fact. There was a normal, sane simplicity in Sylvia's nature which clamoured for duty and real interest, whereas only pleasure was offered. Often when alone in the bosky mysteries of the Bois, where deer gazed at her with trust, and Nature's dignity spoke in the thousand scents and sounds of forest life, the girl felt that there her real self could unfold, drawing within the peace of wide spaces and harmonies which uplifted and tranquillised. At such times she sorely missed her father, and became conscious of a moral solitude which left her heavy-hearted. Knowing of her mother's frenzied love and desire to give her happiness, she realised sadly the impossibility of their two personalities ever being actually in touch.

At one French home, however, Mrs. Bradish caught a glimpse of the society she desired to enter. Madame de Pomeret was a middle-aged, handsome woman of Roman features who held an aristocratic salon of intellectual ambitions, on the lower floor of her great house on the rue de l'Université. Her little husband was a man of brains and cultivation, whom she adored and who she was determined should become a member of the French Academy on the strength of some poems which she and others considered worthy of immortality. To this end she gathered about her literary lights and her "Saturdays" found Mrs. Bradish shining among an odd mixture of great ladies and small minds, listening to pale-faced young women recite soul-stirring odes, while their high-born authors listened with attempted disinterestedness among other duchesses, exiled royalties and distinguished men of letters.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Mrs. Bradish's mind was prone to wander during these recitals, from impassioned eloquence to thoughts of possible introductions. Between each performance, Madame de Pomeret moved to and fro among her guests, her grosgrain black silk and noble head lending dignity to an assemblage whose astonishing costumes bespoke sublime indifference to opinion. It was during one of these pauses that Mrs. Bradish saw, leaning against the wall behind the rows of chairs, a tall, distinguished man, whose amused eyes scanned the company, while he listened absently to murmurs from a literary duchess whose poem had just received a flutter of applause. Mrs. Bradish at once recognised him as the Duke de Petrinac: widower, sportsman, ex-Ambassador to Germany and the owner of a famous house on the rue Faubourg St. Honoré; whose portrait she had seen in *L'Illustration*, and of whose impregnable position the world was aware. "Now," thought she, "is the moment for which I have bored myself."

As her hostess tapped one hand with the tiny black fan held in her other and spoke the familiar formula: "*Silence, mes amis. Je vous prie—silence,*" the chatter died, and Mrs. Bradish quietly moved from her chair to the rear of the room and stationed herself by the door through which the guests must depart, and by which their hostess always stood to receive their adieux. The good taste of her apparel made her conspicuous, and she knew the Duke's eyes found and followed her, but she gave no sign of consciousness of his proximity, until, as she, with others, bade good-bye to their hostess, she deftly murmured to the latter: "Introduce him to me, dear Madame. We meet so often—really embarrassing."

Madame de Pomeret hastily murmured their names and Mrs. Bradish acknowledged the introduction pleasantly and without embarrassment, and moved beside him out into the hall, where she engaged him in gay pleasantries while her

THE MEANS TO AN END

footman found her motor. The Duke, who likewise knew at once who she was, followed her to the sidewalk, and when she called his attention to the rain, scarcity of cabs and the fact that he had no umbrella, and laughingly offered him a lift in her motor, he accepted; and during the ten minutes' ride to his club the acquaintance was skilfully clinched.

During the following weeks she met him repeatedly in the lobbies of theatres, passed him riding in the Bois, and once, after dinner at the Ritz, he joined her party for coffee in the corridor, but she refrained from presenting him to Sylvia, wisely aware that he had at once suspected the usual procedure of an American mother with a charming and wealthy daughter, and she determined to prove that his suspicions were unfounded.

Her tactics proved successful, for at last, piqued by this indifference to the possibilities of social benefit, he asked to be introduced. Mrs. Bradish expressed her willingness and pleasure, but for the nonce, seemed to forget to do so until he was obliged to ask a second time before he was presented.

The girl found his dark face, with its upstanding grey hair, pointed Henri Quatre beard and aquiline nose prepossessing, but his narrow eyes were not steady and his smile too frequent. Two pronounced lines between his eyebrows and the long leanness of his face gave him a mediæval aspect, oddly in contrast to the smartness of his dress and suavity of manner. The acquaintance progressed agreeably. He dined frequently at their house, took them to the play and met their friends, but Sylvia was inwardly enraged at times by the satirical gleam she detected when her mother spoke of America's "old families," or gave him his title, instead of addressing him as Monsieur de Petrinac. In time he became an established factor in their social life, and yet, strange as it may appear, considering precedents, he failed to pay marked court to Sylvia. His devotion was equally shared by mother and

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

daughter, and this impartiality allayed Sylvia's antagonism. Mrs. Bradish at first admired his tact, but as weeks passed and his agreeability remained purely impersonal, she was both annoyed and puzzled, for he was precisely the husband she desired for Sylvia, as he had neither vices nor any present tie known to the world.

Another phase irritated Mrs. Bradish.

He refrained from presenting them to his own circle, quite contrary to the latter's expectations and intentions, and at last she despaired of acquiring her ends through him, yet dared not show any hint of resentment. But it rankled, for he had but to turn the handle of the social portal and bid them enter, but he blandly ignored what he must have known she expected: came and went in her house, was pleasant but evasive with the Americans he met there, and remained negative. Was he waiting, and for what? His pleasure in Sylvia's society was evident, and Mrs. Bradish noticed that when any eligible aspirant seemed to find favour, the Duke usually managed to let drop some allusion or anecdote to the former's detriment, too well authenticated to be ignored.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bradish's imagination grew on what it fed upon. When she read Petrinac's name in the society items among those who represented the goal she sighed for, her anger and determination augmented, until the resolve formulated to gain her end without him by any method, rather than allow him to be a bar instead of a means to an end. What joy to suddenly confront him on his own ground, and to display Sylvia gracing those choice environments which he supposed they were unfitted to enter. Did he once find Sylvia part of his own *milieu*, and accustom himself to the fact that she was there because of her own charm and not because of his aid, added respect would result, and any timidity he might have felt as to her fitness to be his wife, vanish.

All this resulted in Sylvia's finding one evening in the *New*

THE MEANS TO AN END

York Herald a paragraph which she brought to her mother's room and read aloud to that lady with rippling laughter. Mrs. Bradish, propped against be-ribboned pillows, resting for that evening's festivities, listened with lowered eyes, but joined in her daughter's laughter at the conclusion.

"WANTED—By a wealthy American woman of respectable position, introductions to the best French society by a French lady of aristocratic connections. Answer X. X. Herald."

"You notice she speaks of herself as a woman and the introducer as a lady," said Sylvia, scanning the sheet. "Subtle, that. I wonder if the lady will catch on?"

Mrs. Bradish juggled several notes lying on the coverlid. "We laugh," she replied irrelevantly, "but who at? Doubtless the writer received many replies; and which is less worthy—to desire to climb, or to descend from tradition for cash?"

Sylvia opened wide eyes. "Surely you're not defending either woman, mother?"

Mrs. Bradish shrugged her shoulders, a shade of annoyance crossing her face. "Perhaps neither needs defence," she replied. "It is an exchange for value received, isn't it? Trade has become the fashion——"

Sylvia made a grimace and turned away, leaving the paper on the bed. When the door closed behind her, Mrs. Bradish drew the journal toward her and re-read the paragraph, then, withdrawing a hairpin from her coiffure, punched a line about the notice, tore it into minute bits and tucked them into one of the empty envelopes.

The next afternoon Mrs. Bradish surprised her chauffeur by announcing her preference for walking, and dismissed him near the Pont Neuf. She moved along the quai toward the

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

south till the motor was out of sight, then hailed a cab and directed the driver to No. 3 bis. rue de Varenne.

A few moments later she dismissed the cab before the high wooden gates of a grim abode and pulled an iron bell. A small door, inset in the large one, opened automatically from within, revealing a stately façade across a courtyard, the two other sides of which were walled by wings in the chaste style of Louis Quatorze. A concierge in a black skull cap and checked apron demanded her errand.

"Madame la Princess," murmured Mrs. Bradish, whereupon he respectfully conducted her across the court to wide steps leading to the main entrance. He did not ring, but opened the door and announced: "Third floor, left." Mrs. Bradish eyed the aspiring height of the stair curved upward and murmured: "*L'ascenseur?*"

The purple-veined nose of her guide twitched with disapproval. "This is not the Magasin de Printemps, Madame. We have no ascenseur. Madame la Princess rents the two lower floors."

Mrs. Bradish mounted, noting the deep, golden polish of the oaken treads and the wrought-iron banister. On the third landing she paused to regain breath, then pulled a red worsted bell-rope before a modest door. In a moment the door opened, revealing a dark hall and a man servant with abnormally long black side-whiskers which are the insignia of an aristocratic household in France. He conducted her to a salon overlooking the street, whose atmosphere was as dead as the inner tomb of an Egyptian pyramid. The floor was polished to break-neck slipperiness and guiltless of carpet, and thereon furniture, covered with white linen, was stiffly disposed.

On the mantel stood a clock and candelabra worthy of Berthoud, and above hung a superb mirror and portraits of masterly art against paper of utilitarian café-au-lait. A screen of crewel work framed in black walnut stood before the empty

THE MEANS TO AN END

fireplace, and an upright piano of black and gold filled the space between the two long windows, draped in crimson rep edged with yellow guimp.

Mrs. Bradish shuddered. Surely the owner's nature must be embittered by existence amid such unfitting surroundings, while usurpers strutted amid splendours below. As the clock did not go, Mrs. Bradish counted the moments mentally, seated on a square ottoman beneath the crystal chandelier which twinkled faintly when ponderous motor busses rumbled by in the street. When their reverberations died against the façades of the houses opposite, an oppressive silence followed, broken only by the click of wooden sabots on the pavement or the occasional chortle of a motor. Mrs. Bradish formulated phrases which might not rasp the aristocratic sensibilities of the woman she was about to interview, for the mission was a delicate one, and without precedent in her varied career. She had thoroughly posted herself as to the Princess de Luvigny, and was aware that nothing more authentically aristocratic existed in France. The name was one to conjure with, and its social ramifications of power, wealth and aloofness were, to Mrs. Bradish, as frizzled bones to a hungry dog. It was a name which was associated with all that was glorious in France. History enshrined it, and modern fiction utilised incidents of chivalric romance wherein dead Luvignys figured dramatically. Few social functions in the best French society were not graced by the Princess' presence, and Mrs. Bradish, waiting there in the stuffy gloom, pictured her hostess as a frail and lovely victim of modernity, gently proud, a living example of the code she represented; that it mattered not what one possessed, but what one—was.

Suddenly the door was flung open, and on the threshold appeared a stout woman, about sixty, dressed in black cashmere, with a figure devoid of waistline. Her round, jolly face fairly twinkled as she regarded Mrs. Bradish a moment in

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

silence, and the latter felt herself flush beneath the shrewd scrutiny of those eyes, round and bright as shoe buttons. A faint moustache shadowed her upper lip, and a mole sank out of sight in a dimple as the wide mouth smiled genially, revealing two rows of porcelain teeth. Her black hair was parted and drawn down from a parting over her ears in the fashion of thirty years before, and only the haughty carriage of her fine head bespoke arrogance.

Mrs. Bradish rose, feeling suddenly small and of no importance in the presence of a large personality. She felt that here was a character devoid of artificiality: too assured for hesitation in thought or act; independent of other's opinions or criticisms. It was plain that the phrases she had formulated were unnecessary, and that the twain could meet on a clear basis of business commonsense, without subterfuge or embarrassment.

"Madame Bradish?" queried the Princess in French of exquisite modulation. "Pray be seated. A thousand apologies for keeping you waiting, but my maid suffers from toothache—dentists are thieves, and I was directing a poultice of roasted onion. Excellent!"

The two ladies seated themselves opposite one another, and the Princess spread her wide skirts, revealing two flat feet in low-heeled slippers. "I received your note, among others——" began Mrs. Bradish.

"Of course there were others," interrupted the Princess. "Why did you reply to mine?"

"Because of your frankness," replied Mrs. Bradish. "It took courage to do what I did and I liked your note; free from explanations and apologies. Being a matter of business——"

"Precisely. I am a business woman; also a busy one," said the Princess. "And I liked your honesty. A charlatan would have lacked the courage to go directly for what was

THE MEANS TO AN END

desired. You and I, madame, desire to exchange something for value received, and that is to my taste, for with the price of eggs going up, servants desiring to fit themselves for becoming Presidents of the Republic, and one's income shrinking to microscopic nothingness, something has to be done. But will you tell me for what labour I am fitted?" She spread out two fat hands, palms upward, with an appealing gesture. "Therefore, I replied to your advertisement, hoping for the best. Of course I know all about you and your charming daughter——"

"Oh, we're decent," smiled Mrs. Bradish.

"Undoubtedly. All American women are—here—as I have heard your Colony is devoid of men. A little dull—eh?" A world of meaning suddenly twinkled from her bright eyes, and Mrs. Bradish suddenly recalled certain anecdotes of the past wherein her hostess had figured in no dull rôle. But Utica modesties held their place in Mrs. Bradish's code.

"That is as it may be," she replied vaguely. "We Americans are bored by anything which has to be concealed or lied about, and for a man—is it worth while?"

"Astounding morality," exclaimed the Princess. "When I was young, life without concealment was like an egg without salt. However, frankness lends a certain comfort. Does your daughter, madame, know of our—er—possible arrangement?"

The question was abrupt, and Mrs. Bradish winced. Sylvia did not know, and if she ever found it out, Mrs. Bradish well knew how severe would be her unspoken condemnation. Mrs. Bradish had always, when possible, kept her daughter in ignorance of certain manoeuvres, only allowing her to reap the results, and her world-hardened soul had shuddered when the girl had read aloud the advertisement, and spoken of the "lady" having been misnomered. The only thing Mrs. Bradish feared was her daughter's contempt. There had been occasions when Mrs. Bradish had despised, not herself, but her

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

methods, feeling that the motives from which they sprang dignified them. This scheming, adroit, and, at times, almost unscrupulous woman lived not at all for herself, though the world would have smiled sceptically had it been told so. She was profoundly fatigued morally by her ceaseless effort of self-assertion, and only maternal love held her to her appointed task. The Princess' question terrified her, and she at once realised the necessity of plain speaking.

She lowered her lorgnette and tapped the edge of her other hand with decision. "No, Madame; my daughter does not know. If she did, the situation would be untenable for all concerned. I trust she will merely enjoy the advantages of our mutual acquaintance. You will find her a charming girl, of fine sensibilities and somewhat indifferent to the exigencies demanded by the world. She fancies that human kindness descends like manna, from heaven. In other words, she has never been behind the scenes of the stage where we all strut and pretend. She would not care for it. She would find it——"

"Dusty?" queried the Princess sympathetically.

Mrs. Bradish nodded. "Precisely. But I don't mind the dust, if the play gives my daughter pleasure."

The Princess laid one hand on her black corsage with a gesture full of sentiment. "You touch me profoundly. I am pleased that you speak thus, for it allows me to consider ourselves—philanthropists—striving for another's happiness. You wish your daughter to marry, perhaps?"

"I do, if the proper man can be found, and that is why I am here. A distinguished position is a solace for many things, and marriage usually requires a solace. Money is something, but not as much as those without it fancy. Position lifts one to serenity——"

"Not when eggs are three francs a dozen," interrupted the Princess. "And serenity is not healthy. It has been our ruin,

THE MEANS TO AN END

Madame. Before the Revolution we were so serene that we failed to foresee the basket in which our heads were to tumble, and serenity is to-day keeping us dozing behind the grilles of our Faubourg. Poverty or war with those barbaric Germans may prove our salvation, and my male relatives, who now do nothing more strenuous than attend the *chasse* and go to Mass, may be forced into the arena to utilise those gifts which inertia may have left with them."

"But these are modern sentiments!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradish.

"But I am modern," laughed the Princess, "and I only wish my house and furniture were also. I see porcelain tubs in shop windows and desire them, and only pretend scorn of a lift to preserve the respect of my concierge. My relatives consider me mad, but what will you? I had rather be mad than asleep. They speak of the decadence of France. France has never been so well off as she is to-day, and when I see Poincaré, I long to invite him to dinner, but my cousin Paul de Petrinac——"

Mrs. Bradish made a sudden movement. "Is he your cousin?" Her voice betrayed pleased surprise, and a quick, gleaming intelligence passed from eye to eye, during a moment's significant silence. "A charming, distinguished man," said Mrs. Bradish slowly, that her own thought might transfer itself to her hostess' cerebrum.

"Hum!" murmured the Princess. "Certainly he is what you say. His house is a veritable museum. Is your daughter interested in such things?"

"Extremely," replied Mrs. Bradish. "We have the pleasure of your cousin's acquaintance. He often dines at our house, but we have not yet had the pleasure of seeing his." Her eyes were fixed on those opposite, and the Princess read their message.

"You shall do so, and I shall scold Paul for his inhospitality."

Mrs. Bradish, who had repeatedly read of his entertain-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ments, wisely remained silent, and her hostess continued. "He mourns his wife, or rather fancies he does. What he really misses is the feminine atmosphere in his home: some one to sit opposite him at table, take an interest in his career and bibelots. He has cultivated tastes and no vices."

"Probably only he knows regarding the latter," replied Mrs. Bradish, "and as long as he allows nobody else to find them out, it does not matter. My ideas regarding husbands are not precisely those of the average American mother, in that I do not consider my countrymen paragons!"

"Madame, you astonish me. Never have I heard but encomiums of American men."

"Rubbish!" replied Mrs. Bradish. "An American woman is a lonely creature in a matrimonial sense. She sees the top of her husband's head over his newspaper at breakfast, and his yawns at dinner, but he does not share her life in any way. He furnishes her with cheques instead of his company, with the result that they——"

"Divorce?" queried the Princess.

"Perhaps. Why not? She might as well get those cheques in the form of alimony, with acknowledged liberty thrown in. Then he can't saddle her with his nervous prostration when Wall Street has had enough of him."

"And so——" murmured the Princess.

"I want my girl to marry a man who will live her life, and she his. Sylvia is fitted to grace any position. I admire your France. It has all the graciousness of an old civilisation, and I should like to know its best society and to have my daughter find her place in it."

"And so——" said the Princess suavely, with lifted brows.

"I am—here," said Mrs. Bradish, throwing down her cards, face upward.

"*C'est bien*. We shall see what we can do—together. Paul shall assist us in amusing Mademoiselle."

THE MEANS TO AN END

"She has been amused," said Mrs. Bradish, rising. "If he could manage to interest her, it would be better. But might I suggest that he lend his assistance—later? I should like to have my daughter meet him in his own world, on his own ground——"

"He shall ask you both to dinner after he has met you and your daughter here at—teas. I can't afford dinners," said the Princess. Then, as she moved toward the bellrope to summon the servant, Mrs. Bradish laid a light touch on her arm. "There is one little matter," she stammered. "As you said, this is business——"

The Princess paused, stared, then laughed. "La! La! La! To be sure. I quite forgot. I beg you not to look so embarrassed, for I am not at all. You are wondering how to pay me. Eh, bien, I want all I can get, not for myself, but for my village. That is a story. It lies against my park walls down there in Brittany. It makes believe it has a Mayor, a confessor, a hospital; but, bless you, I am all three. There isn't glass in a window or a drain pipe in the streets. As I said, I am modern, and long to replace misery with comfort, with a veritable passion which devours me. But how can I? My nephews all have debts, my nieces their vanities, and my heart is as soft as a duvet. I economise, I live *au troisième*, but before I can buy a postal order to send there, some of those adorable children wheedle it from me, and I sleep not for thinking of those miserable ones, *la-bas*."

Mrs. Bradish drew a bit of paper from her jewel-studded bag, and held it forth, her surprise naked to her hostess' shrewd eyes. The latter laid a fat hand on her shoulder, while the dimple swallowed the mole. "You fancied I might desire a diamond dog collar or a few Paquin toilettes?" She laughed.

"I had heard that——"

"Doubtless there are those who desire such *chichis* more

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

than self-respect, but you will send that nice cheque to Monsieur le Maire, Dol, Brittany, and any others of which you have no need, while Mademoiselle and I become frier and——” But the whiskered servant was bowing Mrs. Bradish forth, and thus it was that Mrs. and Miss Bradish graduated from the American Colony to higher things.

CHAPTER III: THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

At eleven o'clock, Sylvia appeared in her mother's room and found the latter still seated before her dressing table, on which table, among ornate gold toilette accoutrements, lay her bed-cap, with a fringe of reddish curls sewn beneath its frilling, and Mrs. Bradish was leaning forward, courageously facing the morning light, and, with a stick of rouge, tinted her lips, rubbing the colour evenly with the tip of her finger.

Sylvia seated herself nearby, and opened the front of her coat.

"Marie," Mrs. Bradish was saying, "my hips are certainly getting larger. I must begin to roll on the floor again. And tell that minx of a milliner by 'phone that she must take that hat back. I should crow if I wore that cock's feather. Now my engagement block. Heavens! what a day of boresome things. Fitting at Paquin's at twelve. Luncheon at Mrs. Thomas'. Sylvia, her food is frightfully rich. Lie down at three. Eighteen visits I simply must pay. Will just leave cards. Tea at Ritz with Mrs. Walker; she always asks me there to show off. Reception at Mrs. Levyeck's. She gets people to sing for her on the promise she'll get them engagements, poor deluded ones. Another tea at Mrs. Conan's—who is she, anyway? Then that dinner at Mrs. Jones'. We had to go to that—she knows all the nice people at Dinard. And after that, the play, with the Spratts. We'll be awfully late, but I don't care. One gets so tired of these French plays, which invariably have a bed on the stage."

Mrs. Bradish stepped into her skirt, spread upon the floor, and then turned critical eyes upon her daughter.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"You look very nice, Sylvia. What should I have done if you had been born with white eyelashes and a snub nose? Mrs. Morely is fastidious and conservative, and I am anxious that you should make a favourable impression."

Sylvia nodded. "In her case, I hope so too, because she looks—kind."

"Bother kindness!" replied Mrs. Bradish. "Any one can be kind, but few can be useful. Mrs. Morely can do a great deal for us if she chooses."

Sylvia twirled a violet between her fingers without replying. As always, when her mother docketed themselves as aspirants for social advancement, the girl inwardly shrivelled. A sense of dislike, almost contempt for her mother, made her feel guilty of unfilial affection and respect, and accentuated her sense of moral solitude.

She hated this vulgar pursuit of worthless social flare and the emptiness of the shadows which her mother mistook for realities. Quick to observe and sensitive to impressions, Sylvia was often all too well aware of the attitude toward them of persons like themselves, and had seen those critics meet those they ridiculed when their own backs were turned. She hated the whole system of pretence and self-aggrandisement, where each and all were struggling toward a summit on which lay neither dignity nor any real lasting repose.

They were aliens in every sense—without niche or roots, afloat on a sea among other derelicts, bobbing to every wave of circumstance, respecting no one and respected by none save those who benefited in a material sense. The very young girls who, in other conditions, might have become friends in the real sense, now were intangibly antagonistic because of her wealth and her mother's pretensions. She felt in a thousand ways their silent criticism. Her beauty even was to be regretted when it forged envy. Sylvia longed to be loved, and as she twirled her violet, listening to her mother, a sudden

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

moral nausea rose within, so strong that she dared not raise her eyes for fear it would leap from them to her mother's knowledge.

These two beings, closely allied by blood and circumstance, sitting a few feet apart in that charming room, were, for the instant, as often before, separated by the chasm of dissimilar desires. Mrs. Bradish, feverishly straining forward for the girl's happiness, was, with every word, destroying it. She longed to give Sylvia liberty, freedom from care, anxiety or hampering conditions, and yet, with her eager, restless hands, she was smothering that young soul with heavy and sordid bonds; laying it defenceless before a hard world to be pecked at; sending it forth into a crowd where it might wander alone and afraid; stifling its ears to the music of harmonious living; depriving it of the joy of self-denial and unselfishness. To see Sylvia placed high above mediocrity was her ambition, but she forgot that on the heights the winds are sharper and shelter difficult to find. Sylvia, finding the way aloft lonely, longed for the valley where level meadows reposed in sunshine and tranquilly dreamed of peace.

Mrs. Bradish gave one last glance in the mirror. "I'm ready," she said, and together they descended the splendid stair, followed by the maid. Two lackeys assisted them into the motor, after which they whirled out into the greyness of the autumn day. As they passed the wall of their neighbour's house garden, Mrs. Bradish looked up with jealous eyes.

"He's an idiot, that Monsieur de Reizet, not to accept two hundred thousand francs for that old house and garden. No one but an aristocratic crank could live in such a shabby affair. The casements sag and the drafts must be shocking."

They glided down the Champs Élysées between the "islands" on which nervous pedestrians clustered amid rushing motors, which swept by them in dizzying multiplicity, and turned into the Place de la Concorde. Suddenly Mrs. Bra-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

dish leaned forward and seized the speaking tube. "*Arretez à gauche, Gustave.* Sylvia, there is the Duc de Petrinac. The very man I wanted to see. And who is that good-looking man with him—so smart and distinguished?"

The motor drew up to the curb, and Sylvia saw the Duke speak hurriedly to his companion, who looked toward them indifferently and shook his head in negation. Sylvia met the gaze of two grave eyes, and saw their expression of kindness change to one of hostility. He lifted his hat and hurried away toward the club at the corner, and the Duke, at Mrs. Bradish's invitation, entered the motor and pulled down the little seat opposite Sylvia.

In the morning light his handsome face, with its black Van Dyke beard streaked with grey, well-chiselled features and keen eyes, appeared somewhat worn and old, but he kissed their hands with graceful gallantry and spoke with animation.

Although he frequented their house and was invariably agreeable, Sylvia had never liked him, though she could have given no reason for her antipathy. But her sympathetic interest had been caught by the romantic story of his absorbing love for Margot, a little girl of four he had legally adopted. Her origin was only surmised, but the charming little creature appeared on all occasions, and even accompanied him on visits and long journeys. Great ladies, more than willing to be kind to a delightful bachelor who bore one of the greatest names in France, found it surprisingly easy to love Margot for her own sake.

"How fortunate that we met you," exclaimed Mrs. Bradish after preliminary banalities had been exchanged in excellent French. "I am devoured with curiosity as to the outcome of your interview with your cousin, Monsieur de Reizet."

"Alas! Madame, I regret to be the bearer of bad news. My cousin Jehan is adamant; a most unreasonable man who refuses to see where his own interests lie. He refuses because

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

of no reason that I can see, but if he could meet you and your daughter I am sure he would change his mind. Unfortunately he is old-fashioned and dislikes meeting strangers. He works very hard, in our War Office. That was he with whom I was walking."

Mrs. Bradish's eyes opened wide, but she controlled her irritation when Sylvia laughed and remarked: "Mother thinks him very smart and good-looking."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Mrs. Bradish, fearing the Duke might repeat her encomiums to her enemy. "I merely glanced at him and thought him somebody else. He has a chin like a granite boulder. Since I saw that chin I despair of getting my own way."

The Duke's eyes were on Sylvia's, where merriment gleamed. "If you, Mademoiselle, tried persuasion, I am sure the result would be all your mother could desire, for it would not be in any man's power to refuse you anything."

Sylvia gave a mock shudder. "Brhhh! Monsieur de Reizet's hostility sprang at us from that sidewalk like something solid. He evidently didn't like our looks."

The Duke raised two yellow-gloved hands in protest, but Sylvia continued: "Now, don't assure me your cousin was carried away with admiration. Because you have been French Ambassador to Germany is no reason for being diplomatic with natural Americans." Sylvia turned to Mrs. Bradish: "Do tell the Duke, mother dear, that I so prefer a dog comfortably down on all four of his legs, than upright on two, trying to pretend he isn't a dog at all."

Mrs. Bradish looked shocked. "Sylvia! What an illustration of diplomacy."

The Duke looked pained. "Truly, Mademoiselle, you little understand my past profession."

"It isn't expected to be understood, is it?" queried Sylvia.

Mrs. Bradish noted annoyance on the Duke's face and

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

hastened to turn the subject to commonplaces, for he was useful, and an excellent ladder by which to reach social summits. He represented a class which few Americans ever met. Having all, it desired nothing of women of her nationality or type, beyond their money. She knew that the Duke's willingness to partake of her hospitality was a far cry from offering his own. Teas at the Ritz, to which he asked other Americans, he did offer, but so far had skilfully avoided introductions into his own world. Mrs. Bradish had suspected that he was taking her measure and that of Sylvia, socially and financially, deliberately and with acumen, and she also suspected why. The Duke was rich in estates, but very hard pushed for income, and was now seriously considering Mrs. Bradish's daughter as a matrimonial venture. But he was cautious, and having scented, with the Latin's unerring intuition, that Sylvia was no fool, controlled his desire for haste, and was now endeavouring to win her confidence before evincing any appearance of passion, which he felt sure she would treat with scepticism.

The Duke de Petrinac's career had been both active and distinguished. Early in life he had realised that the Republic had come to stay, at any rate during his term of existence, and, ignoring the wails of scandalised relatives, had entered its political arena, first as Deputy, and finally as diplomat. In Washington as Under Secretary of the French Embassy, he had acquired English and a sincere admiration for a country which so strenuously believed in the efficacy of human endeavour, rather than in the glory to be derived from memories of dead and gone glories. He there learned also the uses and power to be derived from money. His childhood had been impregnated with a doctrine of fine scorn for modernism and newly acquired wealth. His parents had guarded the portals of their palace in the Faubourg St. Honoré from the invasion of the destructive microbe of modernity as repre-

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

sented by the American, as from a pestilence, but at the death of his wife it had dawned upon him that his salons were a bit dreary, and that the charm of a porcelain tub was not to be denied.

But his defection was only superficial. Beneath this new desire for comforts, pleasures and gaily decorated dinner tables, there remained an invincible belief in the superiority of his class. With his enjoyment of American hospitalities there mingled always a tinge of patronising contempt. He was perfectly aware why he was invited to the public restaurant at the Ritz for sumptuous Sunday evening dinners. When his hostess trailed through the crowded gallery among her envious compatriots with the Duke de Petrinac at her heels and perhaps a Russian Grand Duke who should have known better bowing her through the door to the observant room, he smiled grimly at his own subserviency to the power of money.

But it had become difficult for him to keep up his own end of the game as one of the great hosts of Paris; in fact it was far easier to dine gorgeously with those who exacted no return, than to strive with an indifferent cook and a depleted wine cellar on an ever-decreasing income.

There was another element in his uneasiness regarding the future. Margot, his legally adopted daughter, would have no future without a sufficiently large dot by which to cover her irregular birth, and as she was the one sincere and strong passion of his existence, all means must be utilised to protect her. He had endeavoured to curtail his disbursements in order to save from his income, but that had become impossible; and this man, feared by many, was himself a prey to fear which robbed him of peace of mind and any real enjoyment.

As Ambassador to Germany he had fulfilled his duties with brilliant success, for beneath his urbane manner was an unscrupulous will and ambition which made itself felt among those who had no love for him or for France. But he found

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

that career costly, and resigned from the Diplomatic Service, much to the astonishment of the world at large, which was far from comprehending that a child of four was the cause. It was a bitter sacrifice for him, yet he made it without one sign of the struggle it cost, and retired into private life, where his energies were galled by inaction, and his thoughts became acrid against a Fate which had given him a great name, a superior intelligence, yet environed him with circumstances which debarred him from benefiting from either.

When Mrs. Bradish and her daughter dawned upon his social horizon, he saw a way out of the maze of irritating complexities. Marriage with either mother or daughter would solve all problems. He studied both, and decided that the mother was unsafe, in that she had too much shrewdness and will of her own to be made an easy tool. She would be apt to watch accounts and detect that her income was not being spent for her own aggrandisement, but was being packed away to make a snug fortune for Margot, and that the lady might not countenance. Therefore, the daughter was the one to concentrate upon. She was charming, intelligent and entirely presentable, and a softer type than her energetic parent. Once his, he could eliminate her mother from their intimate life and doubtless do as he pleased with her dot. Meanwhile he held his hand for two reasons—first because he awaited an exact report from America as to the amount and the source of Mrs. Bradish's wealth, and secondly he felt that caution with Sylvia was necessary. She had an appalling sense of humour, coupled with an odd simplicity of creed which disconcerted him. He had enjoyed success with many women and his methods were far from crude, yet when he endeavoured to throw ardour into glance or word, the girl's cheeks dimpled and he caught a gleam of mocking raillery which left him feeling uncommonly like boxing her ears. Their agreeable conversation in the motor had meanwhile been

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

cut short by their arrival at Dricoll's. The Duke accepted an invitation to dine the following week and bowed them to the lift.

As Mrs. Bradish was about to touch the button to ascend, Mrs. Morely's quietly appointed brougham stopped before the door, and she walked into the waiting web like a kindly disposed fly, to be greeted by a suave "Good morning" from Mrs. Bradish, as free from eagerness as though no joy filled a spidery breast. Sylvia was not at once introduced—Mrs. Bradish was not crude in her methods, and light remarks were exchanged.

Mrs. Morely was too well-bred and kind of heart to suspect motives, and when they emerged from the lift, and Sylvia, as an apparent afterthought, was presented, the former's trained eye at once appreciated the girl's grace and beauty. Mrs. Bradish tactfully drifted away, and Sylvia found herself chatting at her ease with the woman she had long admired as one of that small coterie in the American Colony whose Past is irreproachable and whose Present is dignified and of use in the community.

The large room, flooded with morning light, was surrounded against the wall by a serried rank of fashionably gowned women, intent upon the human manikins who moved about the room with an artificial grace, posing now and then before the onlookers. Their faces were pale and worn beneath rouge, and their necks, protruding from low-cut bodices of gorgeous evening dresses, appeared incongruous with their festive attire. Older women in black, voluble, alert and ingratiating, ran here and there, or knelt before a customer, holding up for inspection tissues and furs, which added brilliance to the pale tints of the room. Each costume was numbered, and "322," "47" were called here and there, as though the living automaton which carried it was non-existent.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Clothes are a great moral support," said Mrs. Morely, observing the room with composure.

Sylvia smiled and sighed. "Those manikins don't look as though they agreed with you, do they? I should think after five years of this they would long for sack-cloth. I never can buy dresses off that little blonde. If I wore it to a dance, I'd hear her tired sighs above the orchestra."

Mrs. Morely turned and regarded Sylvia with mild surprise. "You nice child," she said, "to care. Youth usually only enjoys."

"Oh, I enjoy enough," said Sylvia, "but not some things as much as others. Mother likes frills and fashions and I love just a good time in simple ways, with people I'm fond of. I'm the loneliest thing in a crowd. The Grand Prix made me feel like committing suicide. Nothing seemed real and honest but the horses, and they say they are artificially doctored, too."

Mrs. Morely smiled as she beckoned "19" to her side. "Don't scorn artificiality too strongly, my dear," she said, turning the manikin about. "It covers a multitude of social atrocities. Keep the core genuine, but if society became natural, heaven help us! We'd be throwing our cigarette boxes at each other across bridge tables, and telling the truth, which would never do. Mind you, I do not like lying, but unpleasant truths are unnecessary. Now, these charming toilettes; they cover no end of unpleasant facts. It is the mode to have nothing but bones; but fancy those bones made evident; so we must dress our speech, acts and lives in pleasing fripperies that no one may see the—the——"

"The sadness?" asked Sylvia.

"Well, yes, perhaps. But what does a child like you know of sadness?"

"Not much at first hand," the girl replied with a shrug, naively French, "but I somehow see it under the fripperies. It makes one feel sorry."

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY

Mrs. Morely laid down a tulle corsage and tapped Sylvia's muff with her lorgnette. "Be sorry, but not too sorry. Your mission is to be gay. Many a soul is saved by laughter, when a sermon would drive it to desperation. Experience has taught me that the world finds it easier to mourn with those who mourn, than to rejoice with those who do rejoice. Odd, isn't it? But true."

Sylvia nodded. "I never thought of it, but it is so, I do believe. The other day when some friends of ours were told that a woman we know had her aigrettes confiscated by the New York Customs, they all sighed like bellows, but they did seem rather pleased."

Mrs. Bradish here interrupted further conversation and Mrs. Morely rose to follow the fitter to an inner room. She patted Sylvia's arm affectionately. "Come and see me. Am at home Tuesdays. I have American ginger-bread." She nodded to Mrs. Bradish and turned away, her erect figure and grey, distinguished head drawing admiring glances.

In the motor Mrs. Bradish expressed her satisfaction, but added: "Odd she didn't include me in her invitation, but of course it was taken for granted. We won't go for a couple of weeks, and when we do, we mustn't dress much. It looks too anxious. There is nothing so socially fastidious as a Knickerbocker. They'd patronise William the Conqueror and give Adam points on old families."

CHAPTER IV: THE TRYST

AUNT AGATHE nodded to Aunt Cecile, and they both rose from their high-backed chairs at opposite ends of the dinner table. Jehan and Jack rose also, and with the automatic movements of long practice, handed each lady an ebony staff, as the two serving men in black livery, chevrons and buckled shoes, pulled back their chairs and threw wide the doors. A hound, stiff with age, rose from before the dying embers and preceded the little procession into the salon.

Curtains were drawn, and the faded beauty of pale brocade, Louis Quinze furniture and polished parquet reflected the gleam of dancing flames.

On each side of the cheminée, a deep bergère stood before a taboret, on which was drawn tautly an elaborate piece of embroidery. Two footstools were below and from corners dangled silken bags filled with many coloured silks.

With ceremony the two aunts on the arms of their cavaliers moved to their accustomed places, the sweep of their wide brocaded skirts rustling like dead leaves across the floor. They were astonishingly alike. White hair was piled high on cushions without trace of curl, surmounted by lace caps with lappets. Their faces were tinted like old ivory and their slightly aquiline noses, clear, blue eyes and erect carriage, lent them an air of distinction as fine as it was gently proud. They wore lace mitts, and on their carefully tended hands diamonds glittered in ancient settings, and their feet, in prunella shoes, were secured by crossed black ribbon over

THE TRYST

arching insteps. A footman appeared with a tray of coffee, liquors and a pot of camomile tea, stirred the embers and withdrew. Voices murmured with tinkle of glass while Jehan passed their respective cups.

This evening Jack was ill at ease and his glance wandered perpetually to the clock as he wondered when his elder brother would take himself away to the reception at the German Embassy. Jack's own toilette was a shade more elaborate than usual. His curls were slicked to unaccustomed smoothness; his Eton suit, with its wide, white collar and patent-leather pumps was brushed and pressed, and a white carnation bloomed in his coat. Only ten o'clock. A whole hour to wait before his angel would keep the tryst. Would she come? After all, he was only a boy and she a grown-up. Perhaps she would permit him to touch her hand through the grille. Of what should he talk? Girls were queer, and knew little of sensible things like football and cricket. At a pinch he might talk about dress. He scanned his twin aunts' lappets and mitts for material, but remembered, with a sigh, that his goddess wore neither.

Suddenly his attention was arrested by hearing Jehan say: "Yes, I may go to Amsterdam myself. It is too important a matter to leave to others. If I can carry through the deal successfully it will mean a fortune to me and an immense advantage to France in case of war."

Aunt Agathe sighed and handed her cup to Jack. "No doubt it may be an excellent affair," she said, "but alas! being but a woman, and therefore governed by sentiment rather than reason, I see no glory in serving this unrighteous Republic."

Aunt Cecile smoothed her brocaded lap. "But sister, Republic though it be, it is France."

"Exactly," Jehan replied. "It is France which I serve, and with my whole heart. It is that she may hold her high place among the nations. We have an enemy across the frontier,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ceaselessly vigilant, ready to spring. And being a monarchy she has the advantage of being served by her best men, whose birth and fortune raises them above personal greed. France, alas, sees the bearers of her great names sitting idly by, while men less worthy direct the ship of State. False pride I call it. An honourable past obligates an actively honourable present."

"But dear Jehan," said Aunt Agathe, "tradition stands for something. It soils one's hands to handle modern politics."

Jehan knocked his cigar ashes into his empty cup with a smile. "Not at all. Our ancestors strolled on the terraces of Versailles, their beruffled hands in jewelled snuff boxes, while the people starved to pay for their charming sins. To-day the people eat ham sandwiches on those terraces and our jewels are sold to deck their wives. Our class hides behind grim walls in their shabby palaces across the Seine—sulking, and it seems to be as stupid as it is undignified. They are of no use to themselves or to France."

"It is high time the rightful King of France bestirred himself," said Aunt Cecile, "and end this shocking condition of things. Fancy Philippe, my valet de chambre, helping to make laws I have to obey. It demoralises him. He actually suggested the advisability of installing a telephone to save his legs. I replied that the good God made his legs to do my commissions."

Jehan's laughter resounded. "And what did that modern youth have to say to that?"

"Oh, he was entirely respectful," Aunt Cecile hastened to say. "He has good manners. He bowed nicely, but his words, though doubtless not intended to wound, sounded strange. He said that God indeed made his legs, but also the clever brain of that great American, one Monsieur Edison, who invented the telephone. I said that God indeed made brains, but that the Evil One often used them to suit his own ends.

THE TRYST

But dear Jehan, tell us of this matter with the man in Amsterdam."

Jack spoke from his corner. "What's the time, Jehan? You'll be late."

All three heads turned with surprise.

"You seem interested, old chap, in my keeping that appointment," said Jehan.

Jack rose with a shrug of his shoulders and strolled to the window, from which he drew the curtain, revealing a glimpse of moonlit garden.

"Oh, no," he said nonchalantly, "I just thought as neither of us had—much sleep last night, that——"

"That you'd better go to bed? Quite right."

With one turn of the handle, Jack opened the long window, and, with a terrified backward glance, disappeared.

Jehan rose and stood on the hearthrug, one elbow on the high stone mantel, facing the open window, looking from his six-feet-one down on the two uplifted faces. "Well, it isn't necessary to make the story long by telling you how I chanced to find that poor, bedridden Pole there, but he has invented a unique tissue, resembling paper, which doesn't tear. Yet it washes and irons, and can be sewn like cloth, and, moreover, owing to some secret ingredient in the solution with which it is impregnated, the stuff is practically waterproof. I got the option from him for six months, took it to Monsieur Randon, our Minister of War, and explained what an immense advantage it would be to an army on the march, to be clothed in such a tissue. Sleeping blankets, horse blankets, caps, coats, even tents could be made of it. Being like paper, it has neither warp nor woof and has neither bulk nor weight, nor will it soak up moisture as do our present felt blankets."

"But where dost thou come in, Jehan?" asked Aunt Agathe.

"Between the man in Amsterdam and the French Govern-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ment. If the negotiations go through, I'll be a millionaire, dear aunts, and——"

The twins looked terrified. "It would change our lives," cried Aunt Cecile.

"Which is now all that could be desired," sighed Aunt Agathe. "I can see that telephone, and electric lights, and other strange and hideous——" But Jehan de Reizet bent and laid a kiss lightly on each old hand raised in protest.

"Fear not," he said gaily. "Everything shall remain as thou wouldst have it, though perhaps thou wilt have more money for the poor, and Jack shall enjoy advantages which now I can't afford. But I must be off. Paul is to meet me at the German Embassy. He is much interested in the affair on my account. Good night. Good night."

Jehan found his young brother throwing pebbles into the pool where stars were trembling with agitation. The boy looked up at the sky. "Oh, dear! I do believe it's going to rain again. The world will be drowned. We've only had five good days for three weeks. The lawn is getting boggy." Jehan tilted Jack's head backward and looked down gravely into the blue eyes for a moment without speaking, recalling the note he had read the night before. There had always been complete confidence between them, and any shadow of reserve caused him apprehension; but the eyes he searched in the dim light were clear and steady.

"Not to bed yet; By the way, Jack, à propos of nothing, here is a thought to sleep on. Remember that your body is a shrine for God, just as is the altar of our chapel over there behind the laurels. Honour it; keep it pure. Never desecrate it by a soiling thought or act, lest the Spirit be offended and leave its shrine." He gave the boy an affectionate pat and turned away. Jack heard the gate click and drew a deep breath of relief.

At last! Below him lay the garden, a place of mystery,

THE TRYST

beauty and allure. With a beating heart the boy ran down the steps and across the sward, to the high iron grille which divided their domain from that of their American neighbours. He heard the clock strike eleven far away, muffled by a magnificent tenor voice singing to the accompaniment of an orchestra in the palace next door. A sound of applause followed and then the silence closed around him again like a velvet pall.

The seconds stretched to minutes, and anguished suspense held him motionless. Then he heard a step on the gravelled path on the other side of the fence and discerned a slender white figure coming toward him. Fright seized him. The longed-for moment was his, yet he longed to fly. A soft laughed shocked him to self-possession.

"Well," remarked his goddess, "I'm here. Got that toffey?"

"Mademoiselle!" he stammered, trying to remember the graceful sentences he had prepared for his interview, "this honour overwhelms me. Believe me not ungrateful. My—er—er feelings—er, oh, hang it. I can't talk spoony. It's just ripping of you to come. Of course I've got the toffey. Here it is, but it's sticky. Mind your gown."

Their fingers met through the grille and Jack forgot to thrill. He heard the sound of lips smacking. "It's good," remarked his goddess inarticulately. "I had an awfully hard time getting away. Mother has a musicale on. Do you like parties?"

"Never been to any," said Jack, "except the *gouters* my aunts give, and at them there is so much elegance and fine manners that a chap doesn't get much show at the cakes. No, I don't think I'd like parties."

"Neither do I. But mother does, and I haven't noticed that superfluity of elegance which prevented *our* guests getting away with the cakes. What a pity she and your brother don't get on, for then you and I might have no end of good times

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

together. She'd be in a wax if she knew what I was doing. She thinks I'm flirting with your cousin, the Duke, on the stairs. But I inveigled him to the buffet and—vanished."

"If Jehan knew, he'd be madder than your mother," said Jack. "But then he never saw you."

"Oh, yes, he has. This very morning. He was with your cousin, but scuttled away as though our motor had the plague inside. Your brother doesn't like Americans, does he?"

Jack pushed his heels into the turf, somewhat embarrassed.

"Well, er—he hasn't seen any like you. He says Americans aren't simple enough. He is awfully simple, you know; not in his head, but his ways."

"Madame Petan says——"

"Who's Madame Petan?"

"*My dame de compagnie*. There's nothing simple about her. She's so complicated, one has to draw a diagram to explain her. And proper—I don't believe she ever talked to a man alone in her life. She's a dear, but a dragon for keeping her eye on me, and on everybody else, for that matter. If she could see me now——"

"I wish I could, but it's so beastly dark. I say: I like you awfully. Did you know that for a month I've dodged behind trees in the Bois, just to see you pass?"

"You dear."

"And we'll be friends?"

"We are."

"I say, couldn't you wait and marry me? I'm almost fifteen."

"And I'm five years older. But I might adopt you. Besides, Madame Petan says that marriages between Americans and Frenchmen are arranged by the Devil."

"Hang Madame Petan. Besides, I'm just like an Englishman. I tell the truth, use lots of soap and water, and only like one girl at a time."

THE TRYST

"An American likes one girl all the time."

"Don't you believe it. Jehan says that Americans are just like everybody else, only worse, because they pretend to be better."

"Your brother must be detestable."

"Not much. And he's a corker at golf."

"And your aunts——"

"They're corkers, too—at being ladies."

"They look adorable. But, Jack, I must go. They're sure to miss me."

"Oh, not yet! It's been only a minute and I've just dreamed of thee. Do you know, I wrote nineteen notes before I finally sent that one to you. When shall I see you again? And, before you go, you must see my rabbits. They do tricks. Wait. I'll fetch 'em." Jack vanished in the darkness and came back with what seemed to be the ghostly front half of a rabbit in his arms.

"What have you got?" cried Sylvia, pushing her hand through the bars. "Hasn't it but half a body?"

Jack laughed. "It's all there. The rest is black, so you can't see it in the dark. Feel." Jack bent and lay a butterfly kiss on the hand resting on his pet to cover his shyness. "He has a wife and five children. They live in a pen at the end of the fence."

"The darlings. I used to have them at Utica. Oh, dear! I don't like grown-up Frenchmen any more than your brother likes Americans. They make love on a few minutes' acquaintance, and it's insulting to one's intelligence to be told one is adored when the man hasn't gotten acquainted with anything but the size of one's dot."

Jack nodded. "And I don't like French girls: they're so silly. They scream if you put even a lovely little snail on their hands. And French boys are muffs. They're so blamed afraid of a *courant d'air*. So you see, when at home,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

I'm a bit dull. Men won't bother with me, and Jehan is the only one who understands things. But, then, he is always away at the War Office. The aunts are dears, but they're not much good at any game but back-gammon, which sends me to sleep. Couldn't we meet sometimes in the Bois, or go to places together? There is the Nouveau Cirque——"

"I can't often get out alone," sighed Sylvia. "There is Madame Petan. If she found out, she'd tell mother."

"But——"

"Shhh!—I'm sure I heard a step," whispered Sylvia softly.

Both stood motionless with bated breath, but all was silent. Sylvia put her hand through the bars, and Jack clasped and carried it to his lips. Darkness gave him courage, and he kissed the soft palm repeatedly with ardour. Sylvia withdrew her hand and plucked a rose from her breast, laid it against her lips, and passed it through the grille. "Voilà! a guerdon."

Jack bent above the rose and the hand: he felt a light touch on his curls as he whispered: "I'll leave another note to-morrow under this rock. Watch out."

Sylvia sped swiftly up the rear staircase straight into the arms of Madame Petan. This lady seemed somewhat out of breath herself, and eyed her charge sharply: "Mademoiselle, where have you been? Your hair—where is the rose which so admirably set off your white costume?"

Sylvia avoided the dragon's eye and smoothed her dampened tresses. "It was so hot, dear Petan, I only went out for a moment. Don't be cross. The rose—where can it be?" She looked about with surprised eyes, as though roses grew on the tiled walls of the passage; then, bestowing a kiss on the dragon's cheek, fled.

Madame Petan looked after the vanishing figure with an enigmatical expression until the sound of swift tread was lost, then collapsed on a chair. For be it known that she, too,

THE TRYST

had been out in the garden, not for air or to bestow a rose, but participating from behind a laurel bush in what she supposed to be a clandestine meeting between her charge and Monsieur Jehan de Reizet. But she had erred in one essential: she had mistaken Jack for Jehan. In that lay all the difference. Darkness, subdued speech, and her ignorance of Jack's presence in Paris had all combined to render the situation, from her point of view, one of highly improper but wholly delightful romance.

Now, romance was Madame Petan's consuming passion, all unsuspected by an indifferent world. It must be made clear that she was thoroughly familiar with the history of Monsieur de Reizet through the Abigail who directed the household of the Duke, his cousin. His unselfish devotion to those dependent upon him, his taste for *mousse de jambon*, his goodness and high standing were all known to her. He was a man with whom honour counted above all else, and during the warfare between him and Mrs. Bradish, Petan's sympathies had been with the former. The situation then, as it appeared to her, revealed highly romantic and delightful possibilities. The houses of Montague and Capulet, and two brave hearts surmounting obstacles to their love. Sylvia, young, fair and rich. Reizet, noble, distinguished, adoring. What an idyl! They were made for one another. But, as to her best knowledge, she had never seen Reizet; she breathed a prayer that he might be good to look upon. She recalled a fine head framed in pink tissue roses at an humble café and sighed. Alas! if Fate had but brought such a noble cavalier upon the *tapis*. How cruel was life. He, the stranger, was doubtless as lost as a grain of dust upon the highway, and well if it were so, for Petan trembled at the memory of her midnight adventure with that charming stranger, and what discovery might entail.

Meanwhile Petan remained in the passage absorbed in

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

thought. When and where had the wily twain met? Affairs had certainly progressed with astonishing rapidity, for Sylvia had borne none of the signs of a timid novice. Petan pondered as to what was the wisest course to pursue. If Sylvia failed to confide her secret to Petan's indulgent discretion, or her mother's certain wrath, could she, Petan, admit that she had failed to await that confidence, but had stolen it from behind a laurel bush? Her position in the affair was fraught with difficulty, for at all costs her own dignity must not be endangered. It was all very well to be a dragon, but even dragons are not supposed to prowl round romantic trysts in list slippers. Certainly, her share in the matter, so far, lacked a certain dignity and it must not be confessed.

On the other hand, if confidence was not established between Sylvia and herself, Heaven only knew what Sylvia might not do. Her own dragon's eyes had to close in sleep, and also Mrs. Bradish made demands upon her time. Sylvia, in American fashion, was often allowed to go out alone, and on such occasions the girl might mock conventions.

But Mrs. Bradish—Petan trembled at the thought of what that masterful lady would do if she learned of this affair of sentiment with her enemy on the other side of that contested fence, and that if she did, the heavens would indeed fall. Petan recalled that lady's disappointment regarding Reizet's refusal to meet her to discuss the desired sale in person, and Mrs. Bradish's wrath at the suave and restrained quality of Reizet's replies to her lawyer's letters.

Petan was well aware that discretion compelled her to unveil to Mrs. Bradish her daughter's perfidy, but for once the discreet Petan rebelled against discretion. With the instinct of the born gambler, she resolved to wait for chance to guide her actions, and meanwhile she would watch for the psychological moment to have it out with the reckless maid. Of course, she would see that matters were not carried to ex-

THE TRYST

cess, but her heart was strangely moved to thus taste by proxy the sweet delights of love from behind that laurel bush. When she had heard the sound of a kiss on a white hand, youth had come back to her with flying feet. Sentiment had supplied her imagination with what she had failed to hear, and it had lost nothing in the process.

Well aware was Petan of Mrs. Bradish's ambitions and her desire to place Sylvia high above those who, when she first attempted an ascension of the social ladder, had done their best to push her down. Petan, demure and silent, had seen the Duke de Petrinac mount their staircase and sip tea from priceless cups too often not to scent the chase. His affability to servants was rarely accompanied by tips, and the glossiness of his silk hat and speckless perfection of his white spats in no way blinded her to the fact that *cochers* were prone to swear with vulgar loquacity at absence of *pour boire* when he descended at their portals.

Petan was thorough in her methods. She had not only informed herself as far as possible regarding Reizet, but she went further. The Duke's establishment was governed by a stout and capable housekeeper, one Madame Titot, who combined the intelligence of a ferret with a gift for gossip. Petan had established a certain intimacy with this person, and made it her habit to drop in from time to time for a chat and an apéritif in the latter's snug little room looking on the inner court of the Duke's house. In this way she was well informed of the Duke's past and present mode of life, his adoration for Margot, the latter's origin, the splendour of the ducal house, and that from time to time certain valuable works of art vanished from walls or cabinets. She learned that only the second-best cuts of meat were purchased, and that Monsieur le Duke had a temper, and the courage to show it when things failed to please. All she had learned she kept to herself, but her astute brain was pitted against the Duke, and

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

her soft heart was sworn to Reizet and Sylvia without reserve.

When Petan left the passage and returned to the main house, she spied from an upper gallery Sylvia, lost in dreams sitting with folded hands, while a tenor from the Opera sang of Love and Death in inarticulate Italian. The Duke sat by her, gazing ardently at nothing, his thoughts busy with hidden schemes, caring not a jot for the young girl, her purity, her right to love and be loved. He saw a purse of gold between her slim hands. He sensed the affluence of the beautiful room, and his eyes gleamed between narrowed lids.

Sylvia's thoughts were again out in the cool peace of the garden, where innocent lips had rested on her hand and an ardent young voice had said: "We'll be friends." Then the vision of the boy's face seemed to melt and change. The outlines grew stronger, older, and the same honest eyes were looking into hers, but these eyes were deeper, graver, and held hostility. With startling clearness she read the thought which had engendered it: his contempt for their newly acquired wealth; his scorn of their ambitions and his resentment against their invasion of his peace. The hot glare of the room seemed hateful. She observed the smartly coiffed heads of her mother's guests, where ospreys quivered and jewels sparkled. High, nervous speech followed the music mingled with the distant clatter of cutlery and glass from the buffet, where men fought for champagne and delicacies. Who among that hundred persons cared one jot for either her mother or herself? What place had friendship or affection there? Their very success wrought envy and dislike among those people who, like themselves, were living on the froth of life, careless of duties and obligations toward those beyond the wall of their "garden world." A sense of profound solitude enveloped the girl: a longing for other conditions where sincerity, self-respect, and honest affection could

THE TRYST

warm her heart. She recalled her old home in Utica and her father in his shabby coat holding her before the fire, while snow drifted from a heaven which had seemed so near to her childish imagination. He had given her something which no one else had ever given. What would he do in such an assemblage with his code of earnest living and simplicity? Alas! she and her mother had traversed a strange country since those days, and the way seemed long and none too lovely. Was her life always to be surrounded with glare and confusion, empty save for excitement, where pleasure was mistaken for happiness?

Sylvia stirred restlessly. The Duke leaned forward, no longer gazing ardently at nothing, but into Sylvia's eyes.

Meanwhile Jack, left to his own devices in the garden, remained where his goddess had left him. Who shall say that a boy's love is unworthy of respect? Nothing purer, nothing less egotistical was ever to touch with heavenly wings Jack's heart than that mystical worship which filled him now as he stood motionless in the shadow of the trees. The darkness was radiant with dreams: his brain filled with doughty ambitions. His head seemed to reach the stars, and his feet to tread Elysian fields. The breath of dying flowers seemed as sweet as her touch on his bent head; the memory of her condescension, a consecration. How he burned to do great things, and how he blushed to recall his own insignificant speech when such ardour had flooded his heart. Alas! she would never know his worship; in fact, she doubtless thought that Toffey was his dearest treasure, and that a rabbit's tricks filled the horizon of his experience.

Jack sighed and awoke to actualities. Applause from the neighbouring house deadened his footsteps as he stole softly houseward, trusting in a kindly Fate to allow him unobserved entrance to his room, for he was in no mood for the Aunt's gentle ministration against possible chill. He had

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

almost gained the gravelled path which would be a short-cut to the side door on the terrace when he suddenly became aware of a curious shadow which moved along the white façade of the house.

Jack stood still, watching it with puzzled astonishment. It was the shadow of a man's head, gigantic, clean-cut, smooth-shaven, and with a long jaw and dome-like head. There was something sinister in that black image, intangible yet visibly painted so clearly that even the beetling eyebrows were distinct. Jack stared, not imagining for a moment but that it was the result of swaying branches. The gate was locked and the garden walls too high to be scaled by an invader, and would he desire to penetrate that peaceful domain, where neither self nor adventure was to be acquired? Yet the reflection moved slowly along, now pausing, now seeming to bend though bodiless eyes were peering within from the darkened terrace.

Jack moved on along the gravelled path, twisting his head to find what possible combination of branches could be responsible for so odd a semblance, but even as he did so the shadow vanished utterly. Jack stood motionless again, without any sense of fear, listening, he knew not for what step or sound. But none came. The fountain murmured sleepily from the shadows and a nightingale trilled from a cypress. Jack gained the terrace, where all was as usual. The shutters of the lower rooms were drawn, and through their slats he glimpsed the rooms within, dimly lit by dying embers. His aunts' bergères were empty and the taboret put aside. Beyond, in the library dedicated to Jehan's use, one candle burned, revealing the panelled walls with their low bookcases and the large table in the centre with its writing paraphernalia and their mother's picture in its silver frame. The hound was there, not asleep as usual before the fire, but upright, head raised as though scenting some unaccustomed



THE TRYST

presence, but hearing Jack's step, wagged his tail and trotted toward the window. Jack went on to the main door and softly climbed the stair, resolved to say nothing about the strange phenomenon for fear that midnight trysts might be forbidden in the future.

CHAPTER V: "THE IDEA"

THE Duke de Petrinac never lost the impression of incongruity which accompanied his departure from his own house. The great, domed hall, marble flagged, with its curved, stone stair-case mounting to the gallery: the two flunkeys in correct livery and the haughtiness of the double doors as they were both opened to permit the master's exit: all were fitting and soothing. But to descend that stately perron to a disreputable cab, was an expression of ironic Fate which the Duke invariably resented. He felt that his two menials also were sensible of the undignified incongruity, and that as soon as the outer gates had clanged together they shrugged their shoulders in contemptuous derision.

These details rendered his present errand all the more fitting and necessary, and having at first directed the *cocher* to his Club, at the corner of the rue Royale, he stuck his head again out of the cab window, first removing his silk hat to protect it from the falling rain. "To the Bon Marché," he shouted, and drew quickly back, pulling down the frayed curtain, for he was anxious that the world should not investigate with him the mystery which he was about to solve.

Reports from America had confirmed the fact of Mrs. Bradish's wealth in a most satisfactory manner, and the source of it was now known to him. But incredulity had forbidden complete confidence, and he was now on his way to see for himself this amazing "Idea," which had proved her mine of wealth.

The rue de Bac seemed long, so great was his impatience,

"THE IDEA"

and fear of being seen on this errand: and on arriving at that emporium, he established a new precedent by not waiting for change from the *cocher*, but ran hastily up the steps with apprehensive glances. At that hour the great shop was comparatively free from customers, and he scanned the counters with hawklike glance. A sleek young man in a shiny black frock-coat took pity upon his bewilderment, and directed his steps through intricacies of aisles, till suddenly before him he saw a large sign stretched across above his head, with the magical words emblazoned thereon: "The Idea!" . . . The Duke's heart went pitty-pat with greater emotion than Sylvia had ever evoked, as the sleek young man introduced him to the attentions of another black-coated person who twirled at once before the Duke's embarrassed countenance the dummy of a woman's torso. Beside it lay a number of little bundles tied with pink twine.

The Duke touched the form warily as though fearing an explosion as the clerk leaned forward over the counter. "Monsieur desires to see the American novelty; an admirable substitution for the old form of ponderous weight and bulk? Behold . . ."

With agile fingers the clerk turned a small button, and tenderly embracing the figure pressed it to his bosom. A hissing sound was heard, as though the spirit within voiced scorn of its ardent wooer. The Duke stared while the charming waist and rounded bust dissolved from view, as though an effective anti-fat was working the wonder. In a moment nothing remained but a shapeless sack and a slender rod on a bit of wood. . . . The salesman manipulated them, and lo! they too were a neat little package tied with pink twine. The "Idea" had vanished.

The Duke's sallow cheeks flushed as he gazed with admiration at the performance. "Fifteen francs, monsieur, and it shall be yours, with all its perfections. It will supply com-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

fort to monsieur's entire family:—his wife, his charming daughters, all may be duplicated at will. Thousands have been sold. Duchesses and modistes clamour for them. Monsieur's family may go to the end of the world, yet leave here in Paris with their couturière their very counterpart, whereon fresh toilettes may be created. No more irksome fittings. The Idea graciously does the drudgery; silently, uncomplainingly, and when its duty is done, the Idea retires—fades modestly into this trifling package. *Voilà!*"

The salesman flourished it within an inch of the Duke's nose as the latter murmured: "Astonishing woman. . . . What a brain. . . ." The clerk looked puzzled. "Brain? It needs not a brain. Surely Monsieur would not expect a brain to be included for fifteen francs. Behold: it is this which takes the place of a brain."

The Duke saw the shapeless mass shaken out, a diminutive instrument resembling a bicycle pump inserted in an orifice, and the Idea quickly regained its former outlines of robust health. Another lining was put on, less graceful in outline, and a stout figure appeared, motherly and broad.

"Monsieur sees that I speak the truth. Verily this Idea combines all the types of the female sex. Also its virtues speak for themselves." They did. The escaping air whistled like a pæan of self-praise, and the Duke listened, an odd expression on his face.

"You say many are sold?" he asked.

The clerk raised enthusiastic hands to heaven. "Thousands! Here is the circular. Monsieur will see therein testimonials from the queens of rank, fashion and the stage. All Europe clamours for it. Orders are difficult to fill and——"

"I will take one," said the Duke. In truth he was bewildered. That a palace, jewels, automobiles, and all the paraphernalia of social power could emanate from that little package seemed an anomaly. In imagination he saw

"THE IDEA"

the Idea in every corner of the globe, a stream of gold flowing from it, in which he bathed with revivifying joy, and regretted that he could not wed the Idea instead of Sylvia, as he doubted his ability to tie her up in a packet with pink string and put her in his pocket.

The Duke followed the clerk to the desk to pay, as is the annoying French custom, and while endeavouring to pick up the change with his gloved fingers from the little brass plate, a black-gloved hand intervened and deftly restored the coins with a murmured: "Permit me, Monsieur le Duc." He glanced up and saw Madame Petan regarding him with an enigmatical smile. Her eyes rested on the little packet, and he noticed that she evinced no surprise and his blood curdled at the thought that doubtless she had been quietly witnessing his experiments and overheard his questions regarding its sale.

"Monsieur has then purchased one of those admirable Ideas? I congratulate Monsieur on his wisdom in possessing so useful an article. Monsieur's tailor will perhaps be obliged to make some slight alteration in the figure to suit—er——?" Her voice trailed to silence while her eyes watched him.

The Duke knew in a flash that Madame Petan was laughing at him behind her grave politeness, and that she read his motive with unerring astuteness. His mind worked quickly. What did she know? What did she suspect? What would she impart to her mistress and the American girl of what she had seen, and if she told all, what would they surmise? He was inwardly furious, for if all were repeated to Mrs. Bradish, it would open up to her an avenue of conjecture which he desired above all else to avoid. She could have no suspicion of his financial entanglements, and if he wooed the daughter, he desired that it should appear to be solely from disinterested admiration, for he was well aware that Sylvia would never marry for solely ambitious motives. His

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

splendid house and the manner in which he lived all gave impression of affluence, and he desired that such an impression should be preserved at all hazards.

The Duke had noticed that Mrs. Bradish never spoke of the source of her wealth, and knew that no one likes to have discovered that which they wish to conceal. Americans were oddly sensitive regarding their methods of acquiring fortunes. Trade to the Duke was trade, nor could he conceive of an aristocracy in business. Whether Mrs. Bradish sold "Ideas," carpets, or corned beef was a matter of indifference to him, as long as profits were superlative. Neither did he see ignominy in spending money earned by another, especially that of a wife. Once to his credit in a bank, he became exempt from criticism. As marriage with him would ennoble his wife, so would it ennoble her bank account.

The past year had shown him all too clearly the ever narrowing financial margin on which he stood, and sleepless nights, sordid shifts as to ways and means had brought him to the point where expedients were not to be too carefully scrutinised. His method of ascertaining Mrs. Bradish's private affairs was not above criticism, and did that lady discover them:—well, good-bye to his pretty schemes.

He had another reason for fearing Madame Petan. Certain valuable tapestries and paintings, which had formerly decorated his own domicile, had been sold to Mrs. Bradish through an agent at enormous sums. Mrs. Bradish, never having entered his house, was of course unaware of the absence, and he had so skilfully carried through the business that his former possession had never been suspected. But whether Madame Petan suspected he did not know, an anxiety bred of hatred of this quiet woman whose respectful attitude toward himself never varied.

He therefore deemed it expedient to learn, as far as possible, what might be in Madame Petan's mind. Therefore 1

"THE IDEA"

walked along with her courteously, remarking that the Idea was indeed an admirable creation, and that he had been commissioned by his twin aunts to purchase one for their use. Now one liar usually possesses the gift for detecting another. Petan, conscientiously devoted where her affections were engaged, was on occasion a gifted perverter of the truth. She firmly believed that the end justifies the means, and while she inwardly smiled at the stupidity of the nobleman's fiction, the fact that he found it necessary to lie at all gave her the scent. She knew at once that he had discovered the source of Mrs. Bradish's wealth, and that his interest was personal.

In a flash the situation was before her, clear-cut, and her honest soul revolted. Arrayed against her desire to have Sylvia marry Reizet: poor without title, yet, as she believed, loving and beloved by her adored Sylvia, she had Mrs. Bradish's inflexible will and ambition, the Duke's own unquestionable charm and great name, and Sylvia's gay belief in the honesty of all men until they were proved to be humbugs. However she moved along beside the man she disliked and mistrusted, with Machiavellian suavity, her face as non-committal as that of the sphinx.

"As you say, Monsieur, the Idea is a great thing. They say it was invented by an American. They are so clever—*n'est-ce-pas?* But such things are quickly improved upon and their earning capacity soon ends."

The Duke, suspicions allayed, looked at her in ill-concealed dismay, for her frank allusion to the American origin of the Idea, convinced him that she herself undoubtedly was in complete ignorance as to Mrs. Bradish's part in the affair. "You think, then, that it will pass quickly, this Idea?" he asked. "However, the patentee must already have acquired wealth from it."

Petan regarded herself in a mirror as they passed, with a disinterested air. "Ah! Monsieur, who can tell in these days

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

who has wealth? Here in Paris strangers appear like bubbles on the surface of society, and float gaily for a while. Then, Whoof! They are gone, and not a trace remains. Especially with Americans. What is known of them, in fact? Nothing. Why are they here? Our rich do not fly to America to spend their money. No. Doubtless these bubbles desire to see the best while they last, knowing well that one day they will vanish, leaving nothing but debts behind. Where are their husbands? Doubtless in jail for their sinful methods in affairs. La! La! La! An American woman's wealth is like their husbands:—an unknown quantity."

The Duke listened to these remarks with mixed feelings. After all, she was a dull creature, and evidently knew nothing of her employer's affairs. "The stability of fortunes is easily ascertained," he said, thinking aloud, careless of his listener, who mentally grinned at his tacit admission that he had been manipulating financial tricks. "The worm!" thought she.

They drew near a toy counter and the Duke raised his hat to Petan as token of dismissal, and as she glanced back, she saw him, hat far back on his head, testing the inwardness of a mechanical doll, absorbed.

Petan clambered into a motor-bus and refreshed herself with a caraway seed from her reticule, for opposing impulses were warring within her neat bodice. She longed to unmask the Duke to several persons by telling all she knew; to the abigail of the twin aunts regarding the Idea—purchased for them (?): of that tender tryst and her sympathy for the loving twain. Petan's reputation for discretion was justified and her lips closed over that caraway seed, as though imprisoning foolish impulses, for it was part of her code to never force the hand of Fate. Let things unravel themselves. It would be time enough for her to raise her humble voice when matters looked dangerous for her darling's happiness. Mean-

"THE IDEA"

while her dragon's eye should be vigilant, and her tongue discreet.

When Petan reached home, she entered the courtyard and was surprised to see the double doors wide open and to hear excited voices. She hastened across the asphalt driveway, and stood transfixed on the steps with astonishment, looking into the hall. Directly opposite, the double staircase mounted, each flank below banked by exotic plants. Before these were ranged six rabbits, sleek and fat, nibbling at their ease. In the centre of the hall was Mrs. Bradish, her thin face flushed with anger, while before her were ranged in a row, the chef, three footmen, the butler, two housemaids, and the gardener, all plainly terrified as their mistress vented her wrath in fluent French. Now and then one of the footmen dived for a rabbit, which evaded him skilfully and returned to its feast.

"I must know who brought those animals here," cried Mrs. Bradish. "Alphonse, do you swear that you did not intend to stew them on my fire and carry them home to your family at night? Come, the truth."

Alphonse clasped his hands over his protuberant white jacket with dignity. "Madame, I have no family, nor do I eat rabbits, for they are no food for a stomach of aristocratic tastes. I know no more of these beasts than does Napoleon in yonder tomb. I proclaim my innocence." He waved his hands with a tragic gesture as a rabbit loped between his legs. He dived for it, as did one of the maids. It was like a signal. The row of suspects dissolved, and in an instant the hall presented an odd spectacle as the six rabbits fled hither and thither, ears laid back and pink eyes distended with terror, while squeals, shouts, appeals to the saints, and curses mingled. Just then the appalled Petan glanced upward to the head of the stairs and spied Sylvia convulsed with silent

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

laughter. As the last rabbit was captured, the girl descended the stairs with a calm but crimson face.

"Dear mother: don't scold the innocents any more. I know how they got here. They must have burrowed under the fence into our garden from next door." A general sigh of relief was heard. "You may go," said Mrs. Bradish, waving dismissal. Then she turned to Sylvia. "And pray tell me how you became acquainted with the livestock of our neighbours?" she demanded tartly. Sylvia flushed and hesitated, seeing too late to what awkward confessions she was committed. Her tiresome tongue! She longed to pull it from her mouth by the roots, for consequences might be far-reaching. Petan saw her predicament, surprised a tremor and lied glibly, avoiding Sylvia's astonished eyes.

"Madame, permit me. It was I who pointed them out to Mademoiselle the other day on account of their droll colouring. She knew naught of them but that. And now, let us return them. Perhaps a polite note of pointed remonstrance might——"

Mrs. Bradish's mind was instantly diverted. Sylvia, puzzled by this partisanship and Petan's evident knowledge that the real facts must be concealed, opened her mouth to speak, but closed it just in time at a warning glance from Petan. "Yes, yes," continued Petan: "a gross impertinence to allow the animals to stray thus, but as it was evidently allowed to occur for the express purpose of annoying, Madame will be too clever to allow them the satisfaction of knowing she was annoyed. Is it not so?"

A moment later Mrs. Bradish seated herself before her desk in the library where the best authors in rare bindings lined the walls, and subdued lights filtered through hangings rich in colour. The room bespoke respect for intellectual occupation, but to an observant eye, it had an unused air, as though expected guests had not yet arrived. Yet it was not that Mrs.

"THE IDEA"

Bradish lacked the taste or ability for cultivation. She had passed from it, and those who took her to be without education were vastly mistaken. It is a fallacy to imagine all newly-rich are ignorant, for often it is those whose wealth has enabled them to fill their time with pleasures, who never find time for thought. Art catalogues and Browning are more studied in small towns among the unfashionable than in cities where society fills days and nights with hectic frivolities. Mrs. Bradish had left such matter for old age when her goal should have been reached, for well she knew that in the world where she wished to install Sylvia on an impregnable pedestal, high thinking and plain living were not on the programme. Both were for people of limited income and ambitions for a high place in the next world, whereas Mrs. Bradish's income was not limited, and the present world fully engaged her attention.

She took up her pen therefore, bent on expressing her opinion of the performance clearly and to the point. Petan had vanished, and Sylvia alone was present to soften her parent's ire. "And now," said Mrs. Bradish, "I shall tell them precisely how I feel."

Sylvia hovered near, fingering the bits of bronze and silver which strewed the table. "Please, dear mother, don't give it to 'em too hot. Those two old ladies didn't ask the rabbits to burrow under the fence."

"It was inexcusable," replied Mrs. Bradish sharply, adjusting her glasses, which she unearthed from concealment in her blouse. "The plants are ruined and they should be made to pay."

Sylvia drew a sharp breath with horror. "Oh! don't mention that," she pleaded. "Those Japanese dwarfed plants cost hundreds of francs each, and they say the Reizets aren't rich. Why, mother—the beauty of having money is being able to be generous and big about such things. It is like making a present to one's self, to spare others. You're cross now,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

but to-morrow you'll agree with me, and wish you hadn't."

Mrs. Bradish put down the pen and turned in her chair, putting the tips of her jewelled fingers together. As she looked at her daughter's pleading face there lurked a curious, wistful bitterness in her keen glance, for she felt herself criticised. Repeatedly during the past few years she had known that Sylvia was not in sympathy with her aims or methods, yet every luxury and advantage the girl enjoyed were the fruits of both. Her daughter found her hard. She was hard, intentionally so, for what was ever acquired by softness? But if Sylvia fancied that her arrogance of wealth was from within, there the girl erred, and she felt that in justice to herself, it should be made clear. This woman, sharp, energetic and with no visible sign of sentiment, yearned with passionate desire for allegiance from the one creature for whom she strived. Yet no sign of this showed in her face as she motioned to the girl to sit down opposite. Sylvia ignored the chair and perched on the table's edge, swinging one foot, feeling that she herself was disapproved. She dearly loved her mother, but she did not always love her ways, and the conflicting sentiments wrought both irritation and a sense of contrition. Mrs. Bradish replied to the girl's last sentence.

"You are mistaken in thinking that to-morrow I'll be sorry, Sylvia. I never yet regretted self-assertion. It pays. No one else will do it for one. People, my dear, in this world, either tread on others, or are trodden upon. They——"

"Can't they ever climb hand in hand?" asked Sylvia.

"Only the Christian Martyrs ever accomplished that feat, and they got eaten by the lions," replied Mrs. Bradish. "You think me hard:—no, don't protest, for I am——"

"Not to me, mother dear," said Sylvia, wafting a kiss toward her parent. Mrs. Bradish's heart leaped to the endearment, as it always did, without outward sign. She took

"THE IDEA"

off her glasses, polished them on a microscopic handkerchief and replaced them with more impressive lorgnette. "Yet you blame me, Sylvia, for hardness toward others. Now I want to say a few words to you. Our money is our power, and power unutilised dies. It must be constantly in evidence to be felt and feared; and much that I say, and cause to be done, is with deliberate intention. My motives may be construed as vulgar ostentation, but are nothing of the kind. I'm not in the least vulgar, only I've found that to live as a modest violet, is to live not at all:—one would get trodden on: crushed out of sight. A case in point. Our neighbours despise us: therefore, timid measures would be misconstrued as sycophancy, so we must meet their fine contempt with arrogance. We haven't anything to be arrogant about, except our money: therefore, though I'm not vulgar in the least, I never fail to remind others that I have it. Wealth is respected above everything else, especially by those without it. To-day the rich use their riches as formerly our next door neighbour's ancestors used their rank. To-day their rank in France isn't worth fifty centimes except to those who never had any. A title has but one use: to sell. I've no doubt that Monsieur de Reizet is champing with rage because he hasn't one to sell. If he had, he'd be running around on our Aubusson carpets like the rest of his kind."

Sylvia glanced sideways at her mother with a bird-like motion. "Like the—Duke, you mean?"

"Not at all. He has something beside a great name. He made a career for himself and gained distinction other than of the past. And his house:—heavens! to live in that dream of a place would make one——"

"Long for sunshine and a porcelain tub," said Sylvia flippantly.

"Don't be absurd," replied Mrs. Bradish tartly. "Money can buy both."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"You mean the house and the—Duke?"

"Of course not. I mean—tubs. But as I was saying; that class get a lot of satisfaction from deriding us for wishing to penetrate their Faubourg St. Germain fastnesses. Yet they welcome us with open arms if we bring along a fat purse. Now, for my part, I think we're of better stuff than they are, for which is more ignoble; to give or to take? To climb to what one hopes is better, or to descend from proud tradition? Sylvia: when I was twenty, I read 'Old Court Days of France,' and came over here fancying that a marquise was an exquisite person in brocades with a voice like a dove and a soul quite ready to mount the guillotine blessing her enemies. Well, I came and met one. She wore an impossible hat and a smile which told nothing; and for five thousand francs cash got a Grand Duke, a Spanish Royal Highness and three Ambassadors to come to my first big dinner at the Ritz."

"Where was I?" asked Sylvia with a smile which failed to reveal her dimple.

"Saying your prayers in the convent, dear, preparing for a wicked world. But those were my preliminary skirmishes. Now I get the Grand Dukes without payment, as you know they come, heaven only knows why. That is a point I never can understand: why they come. We aren't as amusing as the demi-monde; as splendid as their own kind, nor intellectually interesting, yet they'll trot down that gallery at the Ritz at my heels whenever they're invited."

"Perhaps it's because we're—good," said Sylvia.

"I've thought that too," replied Mrs. Bradish musingly. "They perhaps enjoy the novelty of self-restraint and an absence of complications. But I don't care WHY they come, or in fact whether they remain. It only looks well in the newspapers the next morning, and really impresses such snobs as our neighbours with our importance."

"THE IDEA"

Sylvia sighed. What was the use of argument? Her mother would never understand. And the worst of it was that she believed her mother, when the latter said she did none of these things for vulgar reasons, because she did them from love, and love is never vulgar. Yes: it was love for Sylvia, pride in her capacity to be other than just a "Utica girl," which had aroused Mrs. Bradish's fighting instincts and raised them to the eminence where, alas! Sylvia found little to really admire in the prospect. She recalled the quiet expression of hostility in Reizet's eyes as he turned from them that morning on the Champs Élysées. It had been sincere, and she winced at the thought of giving him further cause. She went to her mother and taking that firm chin between her palms, said:

"Mother, you're always good to me, so please me now by saying nothing about those plants. I'll go without a gown or two to pay for them." She kissed the tip of an ear where an effulgent pearl glowed, adding archly:—"Don't forget the Duke: he's their cousin, you know, and might resent——" Mrs. Bradish pushed Sylvia away, while longing to embrace her, and Sylvia watched over her mother's shoulder as the following letter was indited:

"MONSIEUR:

"I beg to call attention to the unwarranted intrusion into my house of certain rabbits of prodigious appetites, which devoured my plants and caused fear and annoyance to my household. In allowing them to roam unchecked in your garden, you evinced indifference to the rights of others. I do not claim damages, but would remind you of a gentleman's obligations as a neighbour.

"Very truly yours,

"MARY PHILLIPS BRADISH."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Mrs. Bradish folded the note, unaware of Sylvia's efforts to suppress laughter, and directed it with a firm hand. Luncheon was announced, and as Petan entered the dining-room, she gave Sylvia an inquiring glance. Mrs. Bradish being occupied with the menu, Sylvia threw her eyes upward with despairing vehemence. "What," thought Petan, "has the woman done?" But no allusion was made to the matter until coffee, when the footman appeared with a gilded basket of superb flowers, and the following note, which Mrs. Bradish read aloud, nipping the words as though each were an enemy she wished to devour.

"MADAME:

"Your valuable and gracious note has this moment been received, and I hasten to present my most humble apologies, coupled with those of my aunts and my brother, for the unwarranted intrusion of members of my household into your precincts. Could the intruders speak, they too, would express their regrets. I am desolated that anything of ours should have caused you annoyance. I deplore the havoc: I grieve for your plants. May I beg to assure you that any wounds inflicted by the animals will not be fatal, as carrots, and not human beings, are their natural food. Hereafter, should so disastrous an invasion occur again, I beg you to punish the delinquents by making them immediately into a ragout, for which I will gladly furnish you an excellent receipt.

"With the expression of my most profound regrets and most distinguished salutations, I remain, dear Madame,

"Respectfully yours,

"JEHAN DE REIZET."

Mrs. Bradish threw the letter among the coffee cups with reckless carelessness, while Sylvia eyed Petan's noncommittal

"THE IDEA"

countenance above the edge of her liquor glass. "What veiled impertinence!" snapped Mrs. Bradish.

"He only has a sense of humour," said Sylvia, trying not to laugh. Yet she too was angry. Although her mother had laid herself open to such a rebuff, what supreme indifference to their opinion lay behind the words. Little cared the writer whether they liked his letter or its author. The affair had probably caused nothing but amusement to him. Doubtless they were all laughing at that moment over their own coffee. Sylvia pushed back her chair and rose abruptly. "Well," asked her mother, as Sylvia turned, her hand on the silken hanging, and her face held an expression Mrs. Bradish failed to fathom. "My feelings lie too deep for words," said Sylvia and left the room.

Mrs. Bradish nodded at Petan. "Of course the child is furious with him," said she. "Sylvia has a just sense of personal dignity and naturally resents such rudeness." Petan said nothing, her mind busy with conjecture. A few moments later Petan knocked at Sylvia's door, and to an impatient "*Entrez,*" entered quietly, as though her heart was not beating with hope of obtaining confidences. The girl lay at full length in a swirl of nainsook and lace on a couch before the fire, her long braids falling to the floor. She assumed a yawn, but her flushed cheeks and brilliant eyes denied drowsiness. Petan sat herself down beside her in a low chair, and smoothed the front breadth of her black alpaca. Sylvia's thoughts flew to the lie Petan had told to save her from her mother's wrath concerning her acquaintance with the rabbits, assured that Petan had had some good reason for so doing. What that reason was she was determined to find out.

Petan, on her side, felt that the time had come for frankness regarding the affair of the heart between her charge and her mother's enemy, yet how to gain the desired knowl-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

edge without betraying her own perfidy was the difficulty. It was she who made the first move.

"Mademoiselle," she said, with an attempt at severity, "your looks betray a certain excitement. You are angry:—with whom? Your honoured mother or the writer of that impertinent letter? Surely you have no sympathy with Monsieur de Reizet. He——"

Sylvia had, and for that very reason waxed wrath. "What nonsense. But I'm tired of the whole affair, and, Petan, don't preach at me. When you call me Mademoiselle, I feel that I haven't a friend in the world. You don't love me. You——"

"Mademoiselle, it is a sin to lie. You know——"

Sylvia sat erect and looked Petan severely in the eye. "Quite right. It is a sin. Why then did you lie about having pointed those rabbits out to me? Why?"

Petan recoiled. Sylvia wagged a finger at her. "You peeked. You know you did."

"And if I did, is that not what I am here for, to watch over you, to——"

Sylvia threw back her head with a laugh. "Don't look so scared, you poor dear, I'm not going to eat you. What did you see?"

"I saw but little, but hear I did, though not much. That he is a gentleman, matters not. It was scandalous thus to hold converse with a stranger, thy mother's enemy, without thy mother's knowledge. And to attempt to deceive thy Petan! I have hardly slept, so distraught have I been waiting for thy confidence, and fearful for thy safety with thy mother."

Sylvia, being ignorant of Petan's mistaken idea as to the identity of her swain, wondered at the former's seriousness regarding a lark with a charming boy. Petan, on the other hand, was thunderstruck at the brazen self-possession of the guilty one, and feared that custom had engendered it. Sever-

"THE IDEA"

ity might drive the girl to dangerous lengths, and Petan decided that perhaps gentleness might win submission. She smoothed the tragic expression from her face and laid a sympathetic hand on Sylvia's.

"Come, chérie, tell me all. Have no fear. I, too, was once young. Tell thy Petan everything."

Sylvia gazed meditatively into the fire with brooding eyes, wondering whether Jack's confidence was being enveigled by his brother as was hers, and if so, what results might accrue therefrom. For a moment she forgot her own danger, Petan, and even Jack, in horror of the thought that Reizet might fancy her a scheming minx, who used the boy to placate an enemy: perhaps at her mother's bidding. She had forgotten to charge Jack to secrecy. Was he a loyal soul or just an impulsive child? He had spoken of the intimacy between his brother and himself. Would his French blood betray him—and her?

Petan watched the face she loved with knowing anxiety, for its gravity boded ill. Was there, after all, more than she suspected in the situation? She felt that Sylvia's thoughts had winged to sober and disquieting matters, far from the gay nonchalance of an amusingly sentimental affair, yet Petan dared to give no sign of fear. Confidence must be established now or never, and tact must control inclination to force it. With a rigid air Petan frowned in a proper manner.

"Mademoiselle, I am shocked, horrified at this revelation. Oh! never could I have believed you capable of such behaviour, were your lips not themselves revealing the hideous truth." Petan's black alpaca creaked with propriety.

Sylvia, with an adorable movement, threw herself half off the lounge into Petan's arms, stroking the grim face. "Petan, don't scold. Don't tell mother. I've been so bored with the worthless men here in Paris, and it's so sweet to find one clean and truly loving heart. He cares nothing for my money

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

—only just for me. And he has such charm: and the darlingest curls. I've patted them through the grille, and he——”

But this was too much even for a sentimental dragon. “Curls? You patted his curls? May the saints preserve us. Am I mad, or do my ears deceive me? This I cannot countenance. Truly, I swear to tell your mother all, unless you promise to pat his curls no more.”

Genuine tears stood in Petan's sharp eyes, for she was torn between duty and romance. Also, be it said to her credit, she sincerely believed that this adventure would not result in harm to her charge, but a possible joy. And there was the Duke's nose to be disjoined by his more humble relative! Petan knew how truly Reizet deserved affection, and that his life was devoid of vices. If Mrs. Bradish desired an aristocratic marriage for her daughter, there was none better, though no title shed a lustre, for Reizet's position was distinguished, and it only needed money to fulfil all requirements. Petan was sufficiently familiar with French social distinctions to know better than her mistress that it was not the French possessing titles who, like parasites, eat American dinners and flock to afternoon teas to devour American gingerbread, who were worth while. The French who cared nothing for Americans were the only desirables, and Reizet was one of those.

Petan decided to temporise, for evidently no harm had been done so far of a serious nature, and she would see to the future. To inform Mrs. Bradish would end everything for the lovers, and would certainly result in her own condemnation and dismissal. Yet there was danger to be faced, for any indiscretion might precipitate matters to disaster. During the seven years she had been one of Mrs. Bradish's family circle she had thoroughly acquainted herself with the former's limitations. Mrs. Bradish brooked no interference or independent action on the part of those whose lives she chose

"THE IDEA"

to direct. Assured of her own competency to judge of what was best, and encouraged by success, she was an autocrat, even in affection. She desired above all things Sylvia's happiness, but she felt that she, better than Sylvia, knew what was necessary for that happiness.

Therefore, Petan drew the light silken cover over Sylvia, pulled up her skirts that the warmth of the fire might comfort her ankles, and proceeded to discuss the situation in all its aspects. Once committed, she warmed to the work, and while keeping propriety well in the foreground, gave her promise not to inform Mrs. Bradish, as long as Sylvia gave her word to tell all that transpired, and to be governed by her advice.

Sylvia, somewhat at a loss as to the reason for so much serious discussion, was not loathe to share it, and so far opened her heart as to read Jack's letters aloud. Pure love breathed from every line to Petan's ravished ears, but she advised a conflagration of those burning, but unknown to her, badly spelled epistles. Sylvia demurred, but being reminded of her own carelessness in locking drawers, and Mrs. Bradish's proneness to open them for anything she might need, Sylvia finally consented, and together they watched the love-laden pages turn to ashes. Tears of regret were in Petan's eyes, not Sylvia's, at which the latter wondered.

CHAPTER VI: THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

THE Duke de Petrinac gave his hat into the hands of one lackey and his yellow gloves into those of another, stamped his creased trousers to adjustment and mounted Mrs. Bradish's staircase. Before him, high on the wall of the broad landing, hung a Gothic tapestry of dim beauty, which had formerly enhanced the splendour of his own hall, and he threw it a friendly smile as he ascended, thinking how little its present owner knew from where it had come.

He went up leisurely, sensing the perfection of his surroundings and what they represented, and feeling already proprietorship in them. The scent of flowers mingled with that of fresh stone and woodwork, cleanliness and perfect ventilation. Another lackey met him at the head of the stairs and preceded him to the salon, holding back the portières for his entrance. But the Duke paused an instant before a great mirror which reflected the gallery, and observed critically his black and white trousers, cut-away black coat, broad shoulders and distinguished head. In that softened light he found himself young and the impassivity of his expression betrayed nothing of the exhilaration which filled him like wine.

He found himself alone in the beautiful room. Without, rain streamed down the window-panes, but within all was warmth and comfort. The Duke strayed from table to table examining photographs, signed by the Great Ones Mrs. Bradish had cultivated. He bent above roses in tall vases, drawing in with their perfume the impression of cost and the pleasant sense that the latter mattered not at all to the mistress of

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

that house. The heathen strumpets gambolling among garlands and clouds on the ceiling, the walls panelled in rose damask, and the delicate tints of Aubusson carpet and furniture gave a spring-like gaiety to the room, in harmony with his mood.

The Duke resisted a bergère's puffy cushion, and awaited Mrs. Bradish without eagerness or trepidation. Before making up his mind to ask her daughter's hand in marriage, he had well considered advantages and disadvantages, and the latter outnumbered the former sufficiently to give him an almost tender feeling toward the young girl, through whom a weight of anxiety was to be lifted, and a secure future be assured financially for Margot. There had been moments when he wondered how Sylvia would accept the part of mother she must play to the child, but trusted in the latter's charm and Sylvia's kindness of heart to bridge the gulf without discomfort to himself. If the gulf was not bridged, then so much the worse for Sylvia.

The Duke had some uncomfortable doubts as to Sylvia, but none as to her mother, for during the past weeks he felt sure that the latter had comprehended his desires and intentions, and acquiesced. But Sylvia was an uncertain quantity. Beneath her gaiety and frank pleasure in his company he felt there lay an evasive reservation of judgment. She studied him as he studied her, and at times he had the uncomfortable sensation that she knew him far better than he did her. To the Duke, this American girl was mysterious. There are some eyes which can only see well through a clouded glass, and this young girl was so limpid, so devoid of pretence and studied beguilement that, to his jaded taste, she lacked lure. She was at once too frank and too reticent. She spoke of matters pertaining to life and of certain literature which made him gasp, yet when he ventured a mild *double entendre*, she looked at him, like a child, and asked him to

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

explain the point. She would need training, and he felt himself fully equal to the task.

The Duke's peregrinations had brought him to the further end of the long room which was divided by portières from the smaller salon. Suddenly he heard a door open in the further room and Sylvia's voice from beyond it. Now it was entirely within the Duke's code of honour not to listen at key holes, but portières were not included, and he paused, tip-toed deftly across intervening space, where a masterpiece by Harpigny filled a corner by the aperture, and there remained eyes raised, apparently lost in admiration, but with ears strained for what passed beyond.

"No, Mother. I won't go in. Be a dear and see the Duke."

"But why, Sylvia? Surely you——"

"No, I don't. I don't like his waistcoats, the way he uses his feet, or his fine, white teeth. They look cruel and he looks at me in a way that makes me want to take a bath."

"No reasons at all——" But the Duke waited to hear no more, feeling that these expressions of the young lady's sentiments toward him, disconcerted him for what he had come to accomplish. He carried his objectionable feet in their patent leathers and spruce spats delicately across the room and sank into the soothing puffery of a chair. His collar felt suddenly as though it was choking him, and he thrust two fingers between it and his throat, twisting his head to and fro, eyes closed, seeing a suffused, red light behind his lids.

A moment later Mrs. Bradish entered, composed, erect and apparently with no thought save one of pleasure at his presence there, but her glance quickly studied his face, questioning its impassivity, to learn whether he had by chance overheard. But the Duke hastened to meet her: took her hand, drew her heels together, and with a profound bow laid a kiss on the cabochon emerald, as though in homage to what it represented. Mrs. Bradish had just returned from the rue de

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

Paix, and was still in her severely cut blue serge. She pushed her veil up over the brim of her hat and seated herself, back to the window, where the light caught the gleam of her reddish hair and left her face in shadow. The Duke remained for a moment standing, one hand on the back of his own chair, and at once Mrs. Bradish felt an uncommon ceremony and solemnity in his respectful attitude, and suspected why he had come. As he at last seated himself without speaking, and settled himself in the chair, she suddenly bridged the years; at the distant end she saw the kitchen at Utica with its unshaded gas burner above the wooden table; the worn strip of black and white oil-cloth before the range, the green cotton shade drawn down over the window, and Sylvia, in her plaid merino dress and hair in a braid, with elbow on the table, blue eyes watching her shears as she cut out the first "Idea." And now:—with almost a sense of fear at the unreality, she glanced about the room and at the man before her. She had reached the summit and felt an instant's vertigo, for somehow she felt alone there, as though her daughter had evaded and was slipping from her grasp.

The Duke was speaking. "Madame, when one feels deeply, diplomacy is difficult: being the art of subtlety——"

"The subtlety of art," murmured Mrs. Bradish.

"Precisely. It was invented to obviate everything but polite percussion. I am here not to demand, but to persuade, yet the occasion is momentous, at least to me, and——"

Mrs. Bradish regarded the Duke curiously, smiling, as though taking pleasure in his adroit effort to appear embarrassed. "Truth, dear Duke, is the best diplomacy, for, being unexpected, is rarely believed."

The Duke cleared his throat, wondering whether the lies he was about to utter were to be believed. He leaned forward, clasped hands hanging between his knees with an earnest air. "For once, Madame, let Truth be believed. I love your

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

daughter. I do myself the honour of asking of you her hand in marriage."

Mrs. Bradish did not speak or move, but studied intently the unmoved countenance before her. Of course he lied: all men did, but experience had taught her that love was not everything. It passed—always—and then, without compensations—It was the compensations which played the greater part in existence, and he had them to offer. She stuck out one foot and regarded the tip of her smart little shoe with a critical air.

"My friend," she said, without looking at him, "let us be entirely frank. Let us conduct this matter in American fashion, without lawyers and red tape. I am a practical woman. Marriage is largely a business partnership and should be discussed in a business-like way. You say you love my daughter. Of that no human being but yourself knows the truth. Doubtless you do, for she is worthy of any man's love. Yet few men have the capacity for love, if they be Latin. When you say, 'je suis amoureux':—you call it love. It is not the American meaning, but neither the one nor the other is eternal."

Mrs. Bradish looked directly into the Duke's eyes, and he saw there now for the first time a sudden gleam of almost ferocity of feeling. It was but a fleeting gleam, but suddenly he realised that Mrs. Bradish had temperament, and almost regretted that he had not chosen her rather than her daughter for his wife. "My friend," Mrs. Bradish continued, "I love my daughter. If I give her to you it is but for one reason: her individual happiness. You may accept that as a fact. It will be because I believe that by the time she has reached old age, she will look down the years, and see her life crowded with interests which have satisfied her brain. There will doubtless be children to satisfy her heart, and the combination is all that most women can hope for. You are

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

a gentleman, and as far as I have been able to learn without vices. You are also too intelligent and too experienced with women, not to have learned that it is policy to make a woman happy. It is easily done. Politeness and kindness are the principal essentials, with a care to guard against too much intimacy."

Mrs. Bradish paused and the Duke thought: "What a woman! The girl is mine." "Love goes hand-in-hand with politeness and kindness, does it not, Madame?"

"Hum—Not always in France," said Mrs. Bradish with a slight smile. "Here the average murderer appears to be acquitted because his crime was caused by—l'amour! But that, of course, pertains to another class. However, while I give my consent——"

The Duke sprang to his feet, seized both her hands and kissed them with ardour, without interrupting the flow of words. "Sylvia's will have to be gained also. I force nothing."

"But you will lend your influence to my cause?" queried the Duke.

"Most certainly."

"Madame: my gratitude—— when she is mine, heaven will bear witness——"

"But she isn't yours—yet. I may tell you that my daughter has her own ideas and opinions, extremely clearly defined, and while she usually defers to my judgment, no human being, not even a mother, always knows what is going on in the life and the head of another. So far, I am confident she has no secrets from me——"

"There is no other man?" queried the Duke.

"Most certainly not, and you will forgive me if I say, for your own sake, that you have still to win her. She has some slight—er—indifference to overcome: a certain——"

"Yes, Madame"—murmured the Duke, recalling recent

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

words not intended for his hearing. "I shall devote myself to win her regard: love will follow. It is her independence, her gaiety which charms me. My house is not a home. *Ah, ciel!* How sweet is that word for which the French language has no duplicate. Of course Margot makes a brightness——"

The Duke paused, and Mrs. Bradish knew it to be an intentional opportunity to introduce that delicate subject. She meant to settle that matter speedily and took up the gauntlet thrown before her. She leaned back in her chair and pushed up the cushion behind her as though intent on nothing more important than her spine. "Ah, yes. Margot, the dear child. I quite forgot to mention her. She is—er—visiting you for the present, is she not?"

The Duke looked up from the rose wreath on which his feet rested, and caught two eyes fixed on his face with piercing directness. He knew at once that Margot's continued residence beneath his roof would not commend itself to his future mother-in-law, and that it would be necessary to lie. This he proceeded to do with aplomb, thinking that once his wife, Sylvia could have no power or authority to dictate, and Mrs. Bradish even less. He stroked his pointed beard with a white hand.

"But, yes, dear friend. Margot is now with me, for a time, as her relatives left her in my charge at their death. Being alone in that big house, her society has been but little inconvenience and it has amused me to——" Mrs. Bradish interrupted his vague words. "It must be clearly understood that she is not to be there when my daughter is yours. She is not especially fond of—other people's children and——"

"Most certainly, Madame. That will arrange itself. Your daughter's wishes will govern my heart and my house, and——"

"Her income," interrupted Mrs. Bradish in a gentle voice,

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

smiling. The hard fact was made clear so suddenly and with such suavity that the Duke was utterly taken aback. "Of course. Of course," he stammered, feeling that Americans were horribly crude in their methods. "But we will leave that to our lawyers to arrange," he added, doubting his own ability to cope with this lady's superior business experience.

Mrs. Bradish shook her head. "We will leave it," she said pleasantly, "for a time, but not to our lawyers. I prefer to attend to such matters myself. Oh! don't be embarrassed, dear Duke. I'm not. When Sylvia has become amenable, we will go into details, but no doubt your mind would be relieved to know that I will not be niggardly. If there are some little debts—a bachelor has temptations—you may rely on their departure from your anxieties. Sylvia shall have her fortune on her wedding day, but—it shall remain hers, though her wedding gift to you will make you quite independent."

The Duke rose, feeling that as the main issues were satisfactory, wisdom prompted no further discussion. Also, while he would acquiesce to Sylvia's income remaining hers, there were many ways of making a large portion of it his, later. A woman would do much for peace. His lawyer would finish these trying business arrangements which confused and embarrassed him, and afterward Mrs. Bradish would either have to be amenable, or see but little of her daughter. He bowed over Mrs. Bradish's hand, murmuring his gratitude, loyal devotion and the honour he felt had been done him in her consenting to allow him to woo her incomparable child. With hand on the waistcoat which Sylvia had condemned, he swore a graceful oath to cherish her, with such tenderness as no maid had ever enjoyed before, and finally backed his way out from between the portières, leaving Mrs. Bradish standing framed in the beautiful room, well satisfied with herself, with him and the interview.

At the top of the staircase he came upon Madame Petan,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

bowed pleasantly and passed on. She looked down on the top of his upstanding hair as he descended, noting the sprightliness of his bearing and the tip he bestowed upon the servant who hailed a taxicab for him. Through the curtains she saw Mrs. Bradish standing where the Duke had left her, motionless, deep in thought, running her fingers to and fro on the delicate chain of pearls and platinum which held her lorgnette. Petan scented events, and went on to her room to discard her outdoor garments.

An hour later when she had finished certain notes which her mistress had asked her to send off by that evening's post, Petan found her way to Sylvia's room. The girl was dressing to go out to dine. The satin gown lay on the bed with long gloves and satin shoes beside it, while her maid arranged Sylvia's hair in meek coils about her head before the dressing-table, littered with luxurious toilette accoutrements. A rose-shaded light glowed above, revealing the white shoulders which emerged from a light jacket of pale blue silk. In the mirror Petan's face was reflected, and Sylvia abruptly took the jewelled pins from the maid's hand and ordered her from the room. Taking a hand-glass she twisted in her chair to thrust them in place and then, as the door closed, remained leaning one bare arm on the back of the chair, facing Petan. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes brilliant with the light of battle. Petan stood stolidly, wondering what was coming. Then Sylvia said, "Come here." Petan drew near and Sylvia took one of her hands and laid it against her cheek. "Feel how hot, my Petan."

"And the reason, my apple?"

"Mother is in a blue rage because I won't marry the Duke."

"Mademoiselle, you astound me," said Petan, not in the least astounded. Sylvia crossed her arms on the chair's back. "Why? Because he wants to marry me, or because I won't?" The girl made a gesture of weariness. "Oh! Mother did go

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

on. She made me feel that I was a brute, and you know I love her. Come and comfort me. There, sit close and hold me. Your shoulders were padded just for that. Mother says I'm a wicked, ungrateful girl because I won't even try to love him. But what's the use of trying? One can't say to one's heart:—'love,' as one would say to one's feet, 'walk.' I tried to explain how I felt, but mother says there's precious little in love after five years of married life. She says she was in love when she married, and that although Father was dear and good, that he was only a 'husband,' after all, and that husbands are pretty much the same. At first he thrilled and so did she, and he told her her hair was sunshine blushing (you know her hair was red), and in two years he didn't appear to know whether she had any hair. He was more interested in Plato. She talked of the Duke's position and that house of his, as though they would make me happy. She rubbed in the fact that I'd go out to dinners first, and help make history by being the mother of a little duke. She sighs for emblazoned carriage panels, coronets on my lingerie, and the envy of her old friends in Utica."

"And what did you say, chérie?"

"That I wouldn't marry him though I lived and died an old maid. Then we were both rude, I'm afraid. She reminded me of all she had done for me, which made me feel a wretch, of course; but I said that was all for the outside of me: that the real me was deep down, where only God sees, and that didn't care a rap for splendours. I told her I'd rather have tenderness than all the Dukes in France, if they were like that smooth effigy of a man."

"Ahem," said Petan. "Did he tell your mother he loved you?"

"Of course. She said his voice trembled with emotion when he said he loved me since——"

"Since this morning at eleven o'clock, *ma petite?*"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Sylvia sat up abruptly. "What do you mean by that?"

Petan recounted her morning's adventure at the Bon Marché, to which Sylvia listened with varied expressions and ejaculations. At the end she trilled with laughter. "Oh! Oh! To think that while he wooed the 'Idea,' he was making up his mind to woo me. He didn't dare give you time to tell about it, and flew here on the wings of a taxicab to voice his passion. Won't it be fun to tell Mother?"

Petan raised horrified hands. "Tell your mother? Never." She thereupon proceeded to give her charge of her wisdom and discretion. She vetoed any such foolish proceeding as to tell anything, or in fact to appear otherwise than a docile daughter who has repented of her rash words and intends to do her best to return the Duke's ardent devotion, and that meanwhile "things" might happen. Petan's face was dark with meaning as she uttered this vague hope, for she relied on the other and more favoured swain to overcome obstacles, whereas Sylvia relied on Petan. Petan further explained that it was wise to bend when meeting an obstacle, and that to show open defiance would involve all concerned in discomfort.

Sylvia listened, chin in palm. When the discourse was ended she said slowly:—"I think that I'll flirt just a little with the Duke. One may as well make a task as pleasant as possible. What sayest thou, my Petan?"

Petan ruminated. She was versed in Sylvia's accomplishment in that art, and feared results. If the Duke became really enamoured, as might easily transpire, the situation, already bristling with difficulties, might become unmanageable. Sylvia had wiles, which when utilised were apt to bewilder the masculine mind. More than once had Petan seen hopes wickedly fostered, only to be gaily dashed to earth by the heartless jade, for Sylvia had imbued something of her mother's scepticism regarding the masculine capacity for lasting heart-break, and having charmed, carried her fascinations elsewhere

THE DUKE HEARS A TRUTH

without remorse. Still, the fact that the Duke loved a rubber dummy in preference to Sylvia, rankled in Petan's breast. It was an insult which was deserving of punishment. He little knew the girl's power to wheedle one's heart out of one's breast, and if he still possessed an organ of that description and it was not entirely ossified, it might be a kindness to revivify it. If the process gave Sylvia pleasure and the Duke pain—*tant mieux*. Petan, you see, had claws.

"To flirt discreetly might do no harm," she said at length. "It would serve to allay thy mother's suspicions. But go carefully. Keep me within call, for I trust not the Duke's habits, nor is he accustomed to the American fashion of conducting an affair of the heart. Thy little ways go to a man's head and if a kiss——"

Sylvia jumped to her feet with a shudder. "What a horrid idea," she cried, tossing her little jacket at Petan. "Come, now; you shall be my maid and get me into my gown. Make me charming, for he is to be at the dinner and I mean to make him wake up." She smiled at her radiant image as she emerged from the gown which Petan slipped upward from the floor over her body, and Petan smiled too, anticipating the havoc to be wrought.

"Poor Mother," sighed Sylvia.

"Poor Duke," thought Petan.

CHAPTER VII: THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

THE French have small comprehension of the continual give and take; the careless and often extravagant American hospitality. The Faubourg St. Germain hides in grim palaces across the Seine behind barred windows, on the defensive against intrusion by the modern world with its gay irresponsibility. As a class they have a rooted dislike for what is smart either in dress or method of life. To be *demodé* is to be aristocratic, and shows disapproval of those whose position depends on externals.

The Duke, naturally conservative, enjoyed pleasures derived without cost to himself, so he frequented American society somewhat. Yet he had always been careful not to bring its members within speaking distance of his own class. However, Mr. and Mrs. Morely had been one exception, for the reason that they brought no other Americans in their train, for they avoided them as carefully as did he, and at their house he met only those persons who frequented his own world. But tonight the Duke was to make another exception, in the persons of Mrs. Bradish and her daughter, who were to dine with him ceremoniously to meet his relatives and more intimate friends, which proved how successfully he had progressed on the road of his aspirations.

The Duke de Petrinac's house was renowned for its historical interest and beauty. Its high ceilings were panelled and decorated with exquisite art. The rooms surrounded a second inner court on which long windows opened, where a fountain played on marble dryads and a tiny lawn smiled in

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

peace. To the superficial gaze the establishment was kept up in fitting style, but on windy nights one felt draughts through sagging windows, and the vast rooms, sparsely furnished, were more beautiful by candle-light than by betraying day.

On the eventful evening of the dinner, the Duke awaited his guests alone, standing before the fireplace beneath the high, stone-carved chimney.

The red button of the Legion of Honour illuminated his buttonhole, and his distinguished head seemed more erect than formerly, as he glanced about the splendid room with pride. All was in readiness after days of toil. The lustres in the great chandeliers had been cleaned: the parquets polished by felt-footed servants, and to lend an air of greater comfort to the somewhat stiff splendour of the rooms, sundry cushions and draperies had been "bought" at the department stores "on approval" which would be returned the following day.

Through the closed doors leading to the dining-room could be heard the tread of servants and their low voices speaking hurried directions. The Duke decided to have a last glance at the table to assure himself that all was as it should be, for he had learned that American hostesses could give points to their French sisters in such matters. Therefore he passed into the room and scanned the table. Flowers were scattered among heavy crystal, and silver filled with nuts, raisins and bon-bons set geometrically on plain damask. Priceless glasses for several kinds of wines were at each plate, as well as a glass knife-rest. He was about to turn away, when he leaned over the table and examined the bon-bon dishes with scrutiny, then with a smothered ejaculation, he spoke to one of the servants.

"Tell nurse to bring Mademoiselle Margot to me here, at once." The Duke returned to his position before the fire in the salon, and waited. Presently a door at the other end of

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

the room opened. In the aperture appeared a little girl about five years old in her nightdress, wrapped in a shawl, her bare feet showing beneath its fringe. In her arms was clasped the "Idea" clothed in an old silk waist. The Duke glanced at the ormolu clock and saw it still lacked ten minutes to the dinner hour.

The child stood alone at the end of the room, her charming face as grave as his own. She did not advance, but stood there with dignity, while they regarded one another in silence.

"Come here," said the Duke.

The child did not move, though no sign of fear showed in her face: rather an alert intelligence. "Obey me, Margot," he said.

The child advanced slowly down the room, dragging the "Idea" by one hand. At last she stood before him, looking up into his stern face. Eye searched eye in silence. "You disobeyed me," said the Duke.

"No."

"I forbade you to eat the bonbons."

"I ate them not."

"Margot."

"Not one did I eat."

"I saw the marks of your fingers, and the bonbons had been disturbed."

"I ate them not. I only licked them. Nothing but my tongue touched them:—not a tooth. *Voyez.*"

The pink tongue was thrust out to its utmost length, still discoloured by chocolate. The Duke bent, stared, looked into the clear brown eyes, and then with a shout of laughter gathered her into his arms, while the "Idea" remained forgotten on the floor. "Thou clever one! Ever dost thou thus get the better of me, cherub that thou art."

Margot nestled against his cheek, relieved, but not at all disconcerted. The hands of the clock had passed the dinner

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

hour, but both had forgotten time. The man's face was transformed, while they talked nonsense merrily. Just then the wide doors at the other end of the room were flung open by two flunkies, and the Princess in an old-fashioned black brocade with wide, round skirt swept toward them. Her hair was parted and brought down over her ears in the fashion of fifty years ago, and her broad bosom was scantily covered by a fichu of priceless lace, none too clean. Broad gold bracelets, inset with cameos, clasped her fat arms over which white gloves, too short to reach the elbow sleeves, were drawn. Evidently her dress was not of recent date, as increased avoirdupois had shortened it in front, revealing two flat feet in low-heeled slippers and white stockings. Her face was round, shiny and good-natured, and her eyes twinkled as they rested on the twain. The Duke hastened forward to meet her, the child on his arm.

"Princess, welcome." He was about to kiss her hand, but she had taken the child's bare foot, and kissed its soft instep, while Margot pranced up and down, her eyes apprehensively fixed on her nurse in the doorway. The Princess laughed, revealing porcelain teeth. "So you have adopted Chinese fashions, in that the sweets are served before soup?" she asked.

The Duke beckoned to the nurse and handed Margot to her arms. "You are the only guest so favoured," he said, throwing a kiss to Margot, who again waggled her tongue at him. Then the door closed, as through the opposite one other great names were announced. Some of the ladies were young and delightfully gowned, and their hair marvels of the coiffeur's art. Others were somewhat shabby as to raiment and carried superb jewels. The men, bearing names familiar in the history of France, appeared commonplace, sallow and badly tailored. None of them, save the Duke, looked in robust health, and seemed profoundly fatigued morally and physically. But

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

the room, lit by countless candles, resounded with airy conversation. The men spoke with animation, leaning above the women in attitudes of devotion.

That the reason of their presence there was suspected was evinced by their constant glances toward the door, though their good taste was proven by the absence of any allusion to their host.

At last the groom of the chambers announced: "Madame Bradish. Mademoiselle Bradish," and all heads turned and voices hushed for a moment as the two ladies greeted their host. All knew what their advent portended, for these were the Famous Americans who were to regild the tarnished cornices above them.

Both mother and daughter were admirably gowned. Sylvia's slender throat and spirited head bore no jewels, and her sheathlike white satin gown was of evident costliness, despite its apparent simplicity. Mrs. Bradish, in pale grey, mistily veiled with priceless lace, was also conservative, and a necklace of perfectly matched pearls three yards long wound thrice about her throat and, falling over her trim figure, seemed to speak of wealth restrained by good taste.

Mrs. Bradish was not in the least embarrassed. After ten years of social conflict, she was like an armoured cruiser, armed at all points. While this event was of importance to Sylvia and herself, it was not as vital as to those assembled to meet them; and of this she desired to appear aware. If they were passing judgment on her daughter and herself, so was Mrs. Bradish taking stock, and she allowed her glance to wander deliberately, with scarcely veiled insolence, about the room and guests, while the Duke conducted them to seats near the fire, remarking that he was conversant with the American love of torrid temperature. Three near them were introduced, and then, as is the French custom, all the men came forward

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

to be presented. The following day each would leave a card at Mrs. Bradish's door.

As polite banalities were exchanged, three other guests were announced and to Mrs. Bradish's wrath and surprise, Monsieur Jehan de Reizet and his two aunts entered. The twins advanced side-by-side, their ebony staff tapping the parquet in unison. They made a charming picture in their wide-skirted mauve satins, gathered at the waist, their white heads erect beneath white lace which partially covered their bare shoulders. On each breast lay a large cross of yellowed pearls and from their wrists hung reticules of silk and silver lace.

The younger women went to them, courtesying with respectful affection, and men gathered about them with compliments, when Reizet, standing by, suddenly met Sylvia's eye and from her glanced at her mother. His worldly training stood him in good stead, but Sylvia detected at once his astonishment and annoyance at finding them there. It was plain that the Duke had not told him they were coming and the reason was equally evident. "Of course," thought Sylvia, "the Duke knew that neither he nor his aunts would have come had they been forewarned." How like their host to adroitly direct their footsteps to suit his own interests. No doubt for the first time Reizet scented the Duke's desires and likewise fancied her a party to them, like her mother; and so thinking, must despise them both. For one naughty instant Sylvia relished the idea of being mistress where she now was guest, that one day she might receive him, force him to partake of hospitality he loathed: humiliate him as his presence now humiliated her. She saw the Duke say something to Reizet in a low voice, to which the latter dissented, but the Duke laid a compelling hand upon his arm and led him across the room to Mrs. Bradish. As he was presented, Mrs. Bradish's social genius made itself evident. She looked at him with a charming smile and spoke naturally and sweetly. To observe her, one would have

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

never dreamed that a fence and rabbits had caused bitterness in her soul. "As you are strong, Monsieur, be merciful," she said with the air of a meek saint.

Reizet bowed, admiring her cleverness, yet not misled by it, for well he surmised that it was to a future relative whom she wished to placate that she spoke. But before he could reply, the Duke had drawn him to Sylvia, who, having overheard and seen, was smiling. The mischief in her eyes was infectious, and his own lips parted in an irrepressible smile. But as he was presented his own smile vanished. The girl need not fancy that charm was to vanquish him, as her money had apparently vanquished his cousin. Not he! He murmured a commonplace and turned away as dinner was announced, but not so soon that he did not see Sylvia give the Duke a more delightful smile than he had surprised.

Reizet was profoundly irritated, for he foresaw the outcome of this event. The Bradish family was to be annexed to his own. Even the fence in dispute was not to keep them out of his life. They were aliens, not only to his country, but to all that he revered, and considered necessary to proper dignity of life. He detested the type. These women were without traditions, without ordered sense of duty. Their origin was doubtless obscure, rooted in sordidness of thought and surroundings, from which they desired to escape by attaining entrance into a family where women such as his aunts could teach them the refinements. What vulgar impertinence to place themselves in such an environment. They were pests, they and their kind. Their extravagance set standards which the younger generations of French women were now endeavouring to ape. Their marriages were farcical, for they changed husbands as they did their hats. Doubtless Madame Bradish had a spouse secreted somewhere slaving to supply them with follies, among which his cousin Paul would be included. Their very cleverness was a menace, as were their

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

air of fictitious breeding and chastity, for one could not treat them as they deserved, when externals masked their vulgarity so well. They were marvellous in their newly acquired tricks of elegance. They actually made the Princess look like a cook, and the daughter, for all her cold calculation, had the face of a guileless nymph. He studied her profile as he followed her into the dining-room, noting its purity of outline, small ears and rounded chin. The minx! How dare she be lovely when possessing neither heart nor breeding!

Mrs. Bradish, being without a title, sat far from her host, shuddering at the unshaded light from above, which discovered every rouged cheek and line in the faces about the table. The latter also gave her a shock, accustomed as she was to mounds of orchids and softened lights. It looked, she thought, like a table on exhibition at a royal palace:—hard, ponderous and superb. Sylvia would change all that, especially the crystal knife-rests, as she would see to it that there was a sufficiency of knives and forks to go through a meal.

Sylvia looked about her, frankly charmed and interested. The atmosphere of the room was a new experience. Stateliness and elegant ceremony were oddly mingled with an air of intimate understanding and freedom from restraint, as of old friends. One felt that these people were not only profoundly acquainted with one another, but that for generations close relationships had existed in tastes, habits of life and thought, religion and sentiment. In the American Colony, on the contrary, there forever lay a pall of mutual distrust. Each person was prone to wonder who and what the other was. Each was ignorant of the other's antecedents, their past domestic relations, beliefs and characteristics, and as the unknown quantity is always to be suspicioned, they believed the worst of one another. There seemed to be no standard among them save money, and a willingness to feed one's neighbour if one was assured of being fed in return.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

The few men who mingled in that American society were either too old to work or too inefficient to be employed. There were certain youths too young to be vicious, who "studied" something somewhere; but their labours apparently failed to deprive them of daily tea-parties. Sylvia had heard men boast that they paid for no meal save their *petit dejeuner*, and who seemed to exist only that salons might have the masculine element represented in a society where men were so scarce that it became a serious matter to find enough of them to alternate at dinner tables with women.

Sylvia had also discovered that morality weighed but little in the balance against the art of pretence. If the sinner could entertain, or give large sums to local charities, she was treated with what was called "tolerance" by the "charitable" who desired her dinners. But were she living in a pension, "tea" alone with a man was sufficient excuse to stamp upon and forget her.

But among these French people there was nothing to discover, because all was known, sins as well as virtues, and therefore they were able to turn their attention to other things than personalities. Many called each other by their Christian names and spoke of matters which proved interests in common. Above all, they were gay, even before champagne was served. The princess attempted to throw the Duke a rose, which fell half way, was snatched by half a dozen hands, and finally relinquished when the Duke clamoured for his rights. He kissed it with an air of devotion, and placed it in his buttonhole.

Reizet sat opposite Sylvia, beside a pretty woman with a wreath of diamond laurel leaves in her fair hair, with whom he appeared to be on the gayest terms. The gravity of his face was changed to animation, and being directly in Sylvia's line of vision, each continually caught the other's eye with assumed bland indifference. Sylvia, though she found her

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

neighbours somewhat dull, exerted all her powers of witchery to charm them with such success that the Duke looked uneasy and became absent minded. Reizet was always aware of that small head with its airy distinction, and her mobile face with its fresh lips and laughing eyes. He was curious to know what she was discussing with such animation, and tried in vain to hear, while instinctively appearing absorbed only in his partner.

What a pity, he thought, that so delightful an exterior covered a calculating mind. These American girls, devoid of temperament, trained for the matrimonial market, with their superficial cultivation and sordid ideals, were a pest in Europe. They judged all Frenchmen by their experience with fortune hunters. She doubtless fancied that he too longed to get his fingers into their money bags. It was insufferable of Paul to have thus brought them together, when past unpleasantness had made acquaintance impossible, but as he recalled Paul's probable marital hopes, he realised that more than acquaintance would be involved. Evidently she was to be a factor in his life as an "in-law"—a fixture in the family, whose serenity would end with her advent. And Mrs. Bradish:—one day she would perhaps call him by his *petit nom*. He shuddered, and attacked his favourite *mousse de jambon* viciously. At this point in his reflections, Sylvia's glance, agleam with laughter, met his. Her merriment was so natural and spontaneous that involuntarily he smiled back straight into her eyes. Her glance passed him by, as though he was not, and he frowned, annoyed at having been off guard.

Mrs. Bradish meanwhile was utilising her opportunity, which in this case was personified by a delightful old vicomte who found her charming and lost no time in telling her so. He failed to hear all she said, but his bright little eyes appreciated her smart attire and snowy shoulders. The black moire ribbon which held his glasses caught in the button of his waist-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

coat, and he thrilled as her pretty hands, laden with jewel detached it. He assured her that those hands were the incarnation of lillies, and managed to squeeze her fingers while recovering her napkin from the floor. He found her deliciously ignorant—this originator of the "Idea," and impart much valuable information on matters of which she was better informed than he, but to which she listened with the gratitude of a child.

"*Voyez, Madame.* Flirt not with a Frenchman unless you have more to offer than platonism. Platonism is an insult to a man, and makes of him an enemy. Also forego the idea which you have just expressed, that youth has the prerogative of love. Not so. It is the full-blown rose which attracts, and gives of its sweetness. I have lived seventy years in this city and know whereof I speak. Rubens never painted a woman under thirty." The Vicomte chuckled, and sipped his champagne daintily, that the dye might not come off his moustache.

"You have, I hear, some excellent examples of Rubens," said Mrs. Bradish, who had heard nothing of the kind, but wished to see his famous chateau.

"Not one, Madame. All sold to pay for a new roof. But I have a collection of turtles which would amaze you, named after famous beauties. Madame de Maintenon has but three legs. The Comtesse de Montespan bit off the fourth in a quarrel over a cabbage leaf. Naughty little dears."

"Turtles have such charm," murmured Mrs. Bradish. "Where do you keep them—in a cage?"

The Vicomte recoiled, raising two fragile hands with polished nails in horror. "I, Madame—keep the little angels in a cage? *Quel horreur!* You must know that it was I who founded in France the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. No, Madame, they live in my house like ladies where they will. They care not for travel, and the chateau

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

suffices. The big one has a porcelain bath, but the others wander."

"You mean to tell me that they walk about the house?"

"Certainly. Why not? If you chance to sit on one in a chair, despair not, for its shell protects it."

"And if I found one in my bed——"

"Get out again, and with tenderness—for they are of a sensitive nature, place it in a hat or shoe till morning. One day you and your enchanting daughter must come and make their acquaintance."

The Duke caught Mrs. Bradish's eye and laughed, leaning across the table. He was pleased by the old Vicomte's interest in his guest, for despite his eccentricities, he had social influence, and invariably gossiped like a hen. He would trot about from salon to salon on his high heels, assuring the Faubourg St. Germain that mother and daughter were entirely *comme il faut*: all of which was helpful.

The Duke stood aside as they passed out into the salon after dinner. As Sylvia passed him he ventured to murmur:—"Ah! Mademoiselle, for the first time I resent the customs of my country, in that you were far away!"

Sylvia, aware of Reizet behind her, smiled up sideways, archly: "What matters custom when there is the *entente cordiale*?"

The Duke, with Mrs. Bradish, entered the salon, and suddenly the blood froze in his veins. Reizet had espied the "Idea," forgotten in the shadow of the caryatid which supported the great chimney, and held it up before the company. Its décolleté bodice revealed the familiar lining to the assemblage, Mrs. Bradish and Sylvia included. For a moment the Duke's self-possession was in danger. He dared not look at the inventor, and wondered wildly what her feelings and thoughts might be. Would she faint or scream?

"What is it, Paul?" asked Reizet smiling, all unconscious

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

of the havoc wrought. "A new kind of doll? Where is head?"

Mrs. Bradish proved her mettle and Sylvia never felt more admiration for her remarkable parent than when she took the battered effigy and held it up with a pleasant smile at the Duke. "Your little girl has been playing the French Revolution," she said, lightly touching the place where the head should have been. "Or (and she looked him straight in the eye) you may have been playing a little game yourself. How do you have your coats fitted on it? It seems an excellent idea."

But the Duke, feeling that much might hang on his request, had himself in hand again, and returned her smile bravely. "It belongs to my housekeeper," he lied suavely. "A precious possession. You should have one, Madame. My nephew, who visits here, uses it as a football, which explains its shabby appearance."

The Duke touched the bell, and gravely handed it to a footman, while Sylvia then and there, remembering Peta's discovery at the Bon Marché, made up her mind decisively that no power on earth would make her marry so skilful a liar. She longed to impart her knowledge to her mother, but Peter had counselled to good purpose, and Sylvia held her tongue.

Cigarettes were lit by both men and women, and the party broke into groups while coffee and camomile tea were partaken. The Vicomte still clung to Mrs. Bradish, though the Princess had joined them, with her conspicuous feet well displayed on a footstool. She had been exhilarated by champagne and in a few moments Mrs. Bradish's ears were being regaled by stories from the twain, which made her feel that though her pompadour would fly bodily off her head to the ceiling. But she had learned that to appear shocked was to be ridiculous, and listened and laughed, and even attempted one or two anecdotes of her own, with successful results. For all the time she had one ear open for what was passing

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

a few feet away, where Sylvia was seated between the twin aunts on a sofa. The Duke had decided, as a necessary part of his campaign, to end the foolish breach between his relatives and Mrs. Bradish, and to that end had skilfully manipulated Sylvia near the aunts, and calling Reizet to bring a chair, had then detained him in the group.

Sylvia was in a wicked mood. She desired to charm and to shock: to win liking from Reizet and his aunts, to fascinate the Duke and at the same time to prove how impossible she was, as a member of so fastidious a family. Her manner became gentle, modest, yet flavoured with coquetry. Her narrow gown revealed the long lines of her slender limbs, and she crossed her knees, displaying such adorable feet as the Duke (and Reizet) had seldom seen. Their silver slippers were those of a fairy, as were the pretty hands which she used French fashion in graceful gesture as she talked. For talk she did, and the twins listened to her elegant French with astonishment, wondering at her finished manner and self-possession. As for Sylvia, she longed to kiss their rose-leaf cheeks and to tell them how altogether perfect she found them, regretful that she was about to make them fancy her a freak from a land where the conventions were unknown. What she said would terrify them, but they would give thanks that they had found her out in time.

"It sounds strange to hear you say that you find Paris not amusing," said Aunt Agathe's dove voice, "for we have been taught that it was the centre of the civilised world."

Sylvia laid one hand on the speaker's in pretty deprecation. "Forgive me, if I say that to an American girl it lacks—fun. Fun is different from amusement; it's keener, less trammelled. It bubbles right up from one's heart like a song from a bird's throat. Amusement is more artificial and the mind has more to do with it."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"And may we ask what you call—fun?" queried Aunt Cecile.

Sylvia put her head on one side and considered. Her eyes were on Reizet, but apparently did not see him, but visions which allured. "Let me see. Well, in Utica the men and girls have what we call 'straw-rides.' We trim up a hay-cart with Japanese lanterns, and on a moonlight night, off we go, all snuggled down in the hay, two and two, away to some dim wood where supper will be eaten on pine needles. We sing as we go, and some one plays a banjo——"

"And the chaperone?" asked Aunt Agathe.

"Oh—she is somewhere behind in a buggy with her best young man," replied Sylvia carelessly. "We always choose a very young and pretty chaperone, so she won't have time or inclination to bother us. When we get to the wood, we all separate——"

"The young men from the maids?" queried the Duke.

"Quite proper——" said Reizet with twinkling eyes.

"Oh—dear, no! That would be dull." Sylvia looked at them with surprise. "We separate in couples and stroll in the wood until the horn blows for supper, but sometimes we prefer not to hear it—and—and——"

"And each time you thus go to the woods, you walk and talk with the same friend?" asked Aunt Cecile.

Sylvia shook her head. "Never. That, too, would be dull. Oh! it is lovely! It is dark, with fireflies agleam; and silent, except for hidden streams."

"And of what do you converse?" asked Reizet, detecting something artificial in Sylvia's ecstatic eyes.

She replied, without looking at him. "We don't talk—all the time," she said demurely.

"Too busy admiring the scenery?" queried the Duke.

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders daintily, pursing her mouth so that it revealed a dimple. "How can one remember——?"

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

And then, when we go home, the lanterns have burned out and the moon has gone to sleep, and it is a soft and still summer night. The horses just jog along, and the driver never looks round, and——”

“And”——breathed Aunt Cecile softly, too fascinated and too shocked to move.

“We sing,” replied Sylvia.

“A dull *dénouement*,” murmured the Duke. Both the aunts drew long breaths as though peril had been averted.

“And of what do you sing?” asked Reizet. “Something a bit classical?”

“Often, our national hymn,” replied Sylvia. “You know it? The words mean so much to us.”

“We beg you to repeat it, Mademoiselle,” said Aunt Agathe. “In English, if you will, which we all understand a little. I have heard that they are noble words.”

“They are,” replied Sylvia. She smoothed her satin lap and drew long gloves through her hands, then tautly around her knees, leaning back with uplifted eyes. The little group around her waited, motionless. The old room resounded with French voices, subdued and elegant from distant corners.

“My turkey, ’tis of thee,
Sweet bird of cranberry,
Of thee I sing.
I love thy neck and wings,
Legs, back and other things——”

“Sylvia,” said Mrs. Bradish sharply. They all started, and Sylvia’s eyes came to earth. “I think it is time to go home,” said her mother. They all rose, reluctantly, as Sylvia was pleased to observe. She curtsied prettily to the aunts, smiled radiantly into the Duke’s eyes, nodded to Reizet.

The Duke whispered something to Aunt Agathe, who turned

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

to Mrs. Bradish. "We shall be pleased if you and your charming daughter would come to see us," she said sweetly. "We are quiet folk, and youth brings back happy memories, though, from what Mademoiselle has told us, we missed certain pleasures."

Mrs. Bradish murmured something civil and turned away, but Sylvia took the two old hands in hers, her glance including Aunt Cecile who stood by. "How nice of you to ask us," she said. "I should love to come." She had noted their look of surprise, well controlled, at Mrs. Bradish's evasive acknowledgment of their courtesy. Could it be that Reizet had kept them in ignorance of the feud? It would seem so, for their acceptance of herself had been wholly without self-consciousness. But Sylvia, though she was right in her surmise, did Reizet an injustice when she fancied his reticence to have been born of a desire to smooth his Cousin Paul's path towards matrimony. Sylvia's lip curled at the thought. They were all in the game, but should see that she, too, could play a part.

As the company broke up, Sylvia stood at the top of the stairs, while the Duke himself assisted Mrs. Bradish into her cloak of white and gold tissue, edged with white fox. Reizet found himself beside Sylvia, and with her watched the impressive devotion of their host with similar thoughts, though neither knew it. Others blocked the way and Sylvia, looking up, surprised Reizet's satirical smile and resented it. She drew herself erect, until her head was on a level with his broad shoulder. He turned to her and said formally: "I trust you have enjoyed your first visit to an old-fashioned French house."

Sylvia had enjoyed herself thoroughly, though not in the meaning which her questioner fancied. "It has been charming," she replied. She smiled up at him demurely, and he noticed the limpidity of her eyes beneath their level brows, and suddenly felt sorry for her. She seemed alien to her surround-

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

ings. Perhaps, after all, she might have a heart tucked away within that expensive bodice. Perhaps she had a capacity for tenderness, and an intelligence for which he had not given her credit. He recalled the somewhat exaggerated simplicity of her narration regarding Utica customs, and again the doubt came to him, of her sincerity. Had she been laughing at them while they had been patronising her in their minds?

They moved down the stairs side-by-side, and at the bottom she gave him her hand with pretty friendliness, partly from pride, that he might not fancy anything attached to himself could trouble her; partly from penitence for her mockery. "Good night," she said. "We shall undoubtedly meet often, here or elsewhere, and I trust that you will help me to feel at home in this charming society."

The Duke overheard, and was elated, for surely a deeper significance lay behind her words than appeared. Reizet, too, fancied the girl had come, seen, and approved; and that now the road lay straight and clear to the goal Paul desired to reach. The thought irritated him, and he ridiculed that irritation; for why spend pity or feeling on a situation which was the outcome of personal volition? If the parties concerned were pleased, why should he be displeased? And yet, it rankled.

The Duke detained his cousin after the others had gone, and together they went into the library on the lower floor whose leaded casements opened on to the inner court. It was a long, narrow and severe apartment with a ceiling panelled in brown and gilded wood. Between the windows, on the white walls, hung portraits of their forbears, whose velvet and satin, gold bullion and lace, formed the sole colour, save leaping flames in the fireplace at one end of the room. Two tall, Gothic chairs stood on either side, with a table between, on which were placed glasses, decanters and smoking paraphernalia. The room was sparsely lighted and from without a

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

pale light was reflected from the walls across the quiet court. The two men drew their chairs to the blaze, and for a few moments said nothing, while cigarettes were lighted and the Duke stretched both legs out straight, feet together, leaning his head back against the chair.

"Well," he said, "you think the dinner passed off well?"

Reizet, with elbow on knees, looked deep into the fire for a moment, without speaking. Then he said laconically, "Very."

The Duke looked at him from the corner of his eye, without turning his head. Jehan was sometimes difficult. Evidently he had been bored, but he should realise it had been for a family cause. Was he, too, not sacrificing something—his liberty? "You don't seem enthusiastic," he said, flicking ash from his cigarette with a pointed nail. "You perhaps think the Americans are wary?"

Jehan smiled, wryly. "The mother is, undoubtedly, but you have almost got the salt where you can catch the bird."

"And the girl?"

Jehan hesitated, at a loss, for he had been unable to read her. Again, that sense of something evading, something mocking, troubled his thoughts. Even though Paul was a cold-blooded schemer, that pretty minx had no right to amuse herself with him, and Jean had a strong suspicion that she was doing precisely that. Only time would prove it, however. He turned to Paul. "Are you trying to make the girl—love you?" he asked.

The Duke stared, open-eyed, then laughed. "Of course. Why not? Not that I could become seriously enamoured—she is too frank. One can't fall in love with a being half child, half boy. Not that she hasn't a certain charm——"

Jehan nodded his head with an enigmatical expression, and a whimsical smile lit his face. "Yes. I am with you there. She has charm. She is the kind that teases, allures, seduces

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

the imagination, mocks, inflames and then runs away, laughing at you over her shoulder. Look out, Paul."

"You don't mean to say——"

"I mean to say that unless you look out, she'll play the devil with you. I'd as soon trust a bit of thistledown. Heaven defend me from such a type without heart, pursuing shadows, cruel and sweet, with no more ideality than a picture on a cigarette box. As a wife—*Mon Dieu!*" Jehan blew smoke upward, which twisted like grey, silken threads toward the ceiling.

The Duke's eyes narrowed, till a mere gleam showed through the lids. "Just the wife for me," he said gently. "It will be pleasant—breaking her—in."

The slow words slipped like a suave threat from his lips, and Jehan suddenly saw a future for the "minx" wherein her capacities for gay naughtiness might indeed be broken, and he sighed. After all, it would be a pity. She was so young and care-free. Sorrow seemed foreign to her and Paul was not always—nice. He recalled how once, when rooming with Paul at an inn in Normandy, a finch had waked him from sleep with its song, and how Paul had leaped from his bed, opened the cage and caught the fluttering wings. There had been an instant of silence, while a thumb and finger pressed, and then a soft thud on the floor. Paul had returned to his bed and gone to sleep, with no more song to disturb him. No, Paul was not always nice. There was another aspect of the affair which puzzled Reizet. He knew little of Paul's financial matters beyond the fact that, like most of his class, it was becoming more and more difficult to keep up their position to former standards; for no fresh supplies of money were being acquired by any means save those of rich marriages. Yet Paul had never complained of being especially straitened, and, as he was neither gambler nor dissipated, there had been no reason to fancy that such desperate meas-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ures as marriage with a pretty American nobody had become necessary. Reizet knew perfectly well that there was no question of love in the arrangement, and also that his cousin dearly loved his liberty and freedom to enjoy the one wholesome and sincere affection of his life—that for Margot. Of course, mere convention would necessitate some other arrangement for the child, should this marriage take place, as the origin of her birth was too well known to permit a young wife to accept Margot on a par with her own probable children. Therefore, for the first time, Reizet wondered whether his cousin was not in more desperate straits than any one knew. The Duke was not the man to ever give his confidence to any one. His entire existence was ruled by a reticence which few would attempt to surmount; yet that dinner had been a frank admission that Paul desired to change his existence by this alliance, thereby sacrificing all that he deemed necessary to his ordered life.

Reizet glanced at the Duke, who, off guard, sat silent, one fine hand hanging pendant over the carved arm of the chair. His whole figure, however, seemed unrelaxed, and his brooding eyes, fixed on the flames, were absorbed, intent on some inner, hidden thought. Reizet saw the pendant hand stretch; its fingers spread and draw in, curved close to the palm, as though something had been grasped and was being held therein.

Then the Duke suddenly rose and stood, back to the fire. His clean-cut profile threw a shadow on the white walls. "It's time I was off to the American Embassy," he said, looking at his wrist-watch, which he then pushed back under his cuff. He fumbled with the jewelled links, as he asked: "By the way, how are the negotiations coming on regarding your Pole's invention for the untearable paper? What does our Minister of War think of the samples you received?"

Reizet smiled and sighed. "Red tape takes an eternity to

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

unwind, but Randon seems to think the Government will take it up. Of course the patent has to be thoroughly tested in this and other countries before negotiations can be carried through. Have you studied the description of the machinery I sent you?"

The Duke stroked his pointed beard with one hand, drawing his fingers together at its point delicately. "Yes, yes! But it is Greek to me, because without the secret solution in which the stuff is treated the point is lost."

"The Pole reserves that, I understand, only giving the method of manufacture, but he guarantees the solution and its efficacy when the contract is signed. Too bad he can't get here to put the thing before the Government chemist himself, but that's impossible. He lies on a hanging mattress, with legs higher than his head: flibitis."

The Duke shrugged his shoulders. "Of course, that is all very hard on him, but also on you. I don't understand how you have mastered all those technicalities. Could you explain them to me and so save my poor wits—that is, if it isn't any breach of confidence?"

"I will, with pleasure," said Reizet, pleased to speak of what was vitally interesting to himself. "The process of manufacture is not the crux of the matter. The solution is, and of that I know no more than you, nor will I be permitted to know. That lies strictly between the Pole and Monsieur Randon. It will be what is called a 'secret process.' Only a trusted man in the Government's employ will ever know that formula. If he betrayed it, once the property of France, he'd be as much of a traitor as the rascal who gives Germany a plan of a fortification. As for the process, have you some string? It is exceedingly interesting, and I'll illustrate it for you."

The Duke rose, and, from a drawer filled with odds and ends, finally produced a ball of fine twine and gave it to

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Jehan. The two men drew their chairs closer to the table, and Jehan, with his penknife, cut twine into a number of pieces a few inches of equal length. "Now imagine," he said, arranging them on the table between them, "that these are strands of the most filmy fibre possible—either ordinary cotton or, what is still better, the fibre of the mulberry tree leaf. You know that when you try to cut across a lock of hair the scissors slip and fail to cut, unless you separate hairs and cut few at a time. Well, that is the groundwork of his idea, only the finer the fibre, the harder it is to cut or tear *en masse*. It will blunt the sharpest razor."

Petrinac leaned forward, following each point with sympathetic interest.

"Well," continued Reizet, "it seems absurdly simple. He takes a mass of these filmy threads and places them so that each layer is crossed by another and each layer has its threads or fibres run in opposite directions. Each layer is almost untearable—across—especially when soaked in his solution, which holds them together while at the same time rendering them waterproof. Several layers, one on the other, their fibres subjected to pressure and intense heat, make a fabric perfectly water-tight, untearable, and of any thickness desired."

Petrinac's eyes gleamed. "What a tissue for tents, blankets and coats in place of our heavy felt and canvas now used! A coat wouldn't weigh much more than a 'Figaro.' Have you a sample?"

Reizet opened a wallet and produced a dozen bits of what appeared to be pieces of brown paper, white kid, and heavy leather of several colours and grains. Petrinac took them between his fingers, pulling, twisting, smelling and holding them to the light. One bit he endeavoured to tear across, but it successfully resisted his sinewy fingers. At last, he laid them down in a row on the table.

"They are wonderful," he said, with hearty enthusiasm.

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

"Those leather specimens would deceive an expert. The inventor certainly has hit on something which should revolutionise many things. One sees endless possibilities. He must have a lot of confidence in you to leave those samples in your possession."

Reizet looked grave. "I never leave them, nor they me; for his whole life, my honour and perhaps the welfare of France lies in these little pieces of fabric."

The Duke leaned back in his chair, putting up one hand between his face and the firelight, and then restlessly reached for a newspaper from the floor and held it between the flames and his face. "It depends, of course, on the cost of production," he said casually.

Reizet held up a piece, tapping it with one finger. "He claims that this cost less than fifty centimes per square yard to manufacture," he explained. "You see the plain tissue is coated to look like morocco."

The Duke leaned forward. His paper fell upon the table, and in an instant the samples were scattered broadcast over the floor. He uttered an exclamation of dismay, and bent quickly to reclaim them, and Reizet did the same.

Table and chairs were pushed back, while both men, on hands and knees, gathered up scattered pieces.

"I think we have them all," said the Duke, standing up and brushing the knees of his trousers. He was breathing quickly, as though he had been running. "Look! Aren't they all right?"

Reizet took them and laid his with them on the table. "Yes—no! The small, brown, uncoated bit is missing."

"Are you sure?" asked Petrinac. "Let us look again."

They both recommenced their search, this time with anxiety, for it evaded their eyes. Reizet was annoyed, for, while not of vital importance, still they had been entrusted to his keeping by the inventor, whose suspicions would be aroused. They

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

searched the floor, the chairs, peered into every corner and crevice, but in vain. At last, the Duke rose, flushed and irritable, knowing perfectly that his cousin blamed his carelessness, though nothing had been spoken.

"It simply isn't there, Jehan. I am sorry. It must have fluttered into the fire. But you can explain, and, if necessary, you may use my name to corroborate you."

"It's awkward," said Reizet, irritably, for he, too, was worried and annoyed. He rose from a distant corner and blew out a match. "It places me in an embarrassing position, both with Randon and the Pole. Each will wonder at my carelessness, if not something worse. However, you must look again by daylight and direct the servants not to sweep here till you have searched thoroughly. You'll probably find it, and you can send it to me at the War Office."

The Duke pulled the bell cord and ordered the servant to touch nothing in the room till noon the following day; then ordered his hat and coat to be brought and a cab ordered.

"Really going out again?" asked Reizet, looking at his own watch. "It is midnight."

"Yes; it's not late for gaieties, and I promised Madame Bradish to look in at the American Embassy. I'll drop you or take you there, as you like. You'd better come. They do things rather well there, and it will do you good to see some new faces and smart toilettes. But excuse me a moment while I run up to see if Margot is all right."

Reizet, left alone, leaned against the high chimney, considering how certain it was that he would not go with his cousin to the American Embassy, where that frivolous young neighbour of his would be. She and her kind had nothing in common with him, and the larkiness of American entertainments was proverbial.

Jehan decided that he was not fond of society. Such evenings as the one he had passed were irksome, lacked flavour,

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

and he had passed too many such in similar surroundings among relatives and acquaintances, where real friendship had small place. The young girls were dull; the young married women not dull enough, and men of his own age rarely serious or intelligent. Yet—that Mademoiselle Bradish was certainly enlivening. Jehan smiled, remembering her rapt expression as she recited feelingly the "National Hymn." He remembered also seeing her pause on the threshold of the great room as they were leaving it and turn, looking back at its emptiness with a curious expression of wistful admiration, as though its beauty and tradition had called to her. Her eyes had swept from end to end and up to the ceiling, as though it represented something to her imagination which reality had failed to supply. What had she thought of the evening and of—them? Did she find them according to her ideals of French nobility in appearance, speech and manner? She had met for the first time a real princess perhaps. Did she admire the white stockings and oily bandeaux of hair and would her mother repeat the stories to which she had listened? His aunts, at least, were perfection, and well worth the American's admiration. She had seemed drawn to them and they to her. Odd: for what had they in common?

Reizet heard the Duke's step approaching, and he entered, smiling. Reizet felt that to go home was a dull thing to do. Besides, it was educating to meet other nationalities, and many French persons would be there also. He need not do more than bow to the American girl and her mother, and the music and supper would be good.

In this spirit did Monsieur de Reizet at last accompany his ducal cousin from the room. In the hall two men servants in their full-dressed livery stood on each side of the open door. The Duke paused, eyed the legs of one sharply, and pointed a satirical finger at its white silk stocking, of which the padded calf was not where it should be, but on

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

one side. The Duke tapped it with his cane, as though the man who carried it was a piece of furniture. Reizet had known the servant since babyhood, and now old age had bowed his great height, and powder was no longer needed on his white head. "And so, Antoine," said the Duke, curtly, "you grow careless. This is the second time you make a ridiculous appearance. Your memory appears to have shrunk with your legs. If I find you thus a third time——" The Duke made a significant gesture toward the outer court, where rain splashed in pools between the cobbles. The old man straightened, his faded blue eyes dropped to his objectionable legs. "I beg Monsieur le Duke's pardon. My wife being ill——"

The Duke passed on down the steps. "Such people should have mistresses, not wives; for old age has no business with women."

Automobiles lined both sides of the rue François Premier, near the American Embassy, and their modest cab was dismissed at the curb, for the Duke had no mind to descend from it to the crimson carpet which spread from the porte cochère, in the presence of servants accustomed to more splendid equipages. Within, their coats and hats were taken and docketed, and Reizet followed his cousin through a long, marble-paved gallery, lined with palms, to a room beyond, where the American Ambassador and his wife received them with charming cordiality, and passed them on to greet new-comers. Reizet looked around, surprised not to see more evidence of Jeffersonian simplicity. The walls, panelled in rich, crimson brocade, tables loaded with objets d'art and exotics, all bespoke great wealth tempered by excellent taste. Beyond, in the great ball-room, whose long windows opened on a terrace and garden overlooking the Seine embankment, all was glitter of colour, movement and light. A splendid orchestra played the Tango, and couples moved languidly about the room, with that seri-

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

ous, intent expression which betrayed that thoughts were on intricate steps rather than lost in ecstasy of movement. Diplomats, women of fashion, and men distinguished in many ways stood or strolled with an air of being there more to see than to enjoy intimate hospitality. The proportion of men were French and the American masculines were either above sixty or below thirty. Gilt chairs with crimson seats were ranged about the walls against mirrors, for the cotillion, and snowy shoulders and elaborately coiffed heads were reflected in them, as well as the dancers, who regarded themselves as they passed with sidelong glances.

Reizet saw many he knew, among them Mr. and Mrs. Morely. They were old friends, and she was surprised to receive from him only a cordial smile and that he did not at once find his way to her side. She wondered why he had come there, knowing his indifference toward society, and she watched him as she talked to a friend, and saw that his eyes wandered about the room as though he searched for some one person he desired to find. Then she saw him move and watch a couple near the door. It was the Duke de Petrinac and Miss Bradish. The girl with a perfunctory smile played with her fan as the Duke bent devotedly above her, one hand on the damask drapery. Reizet moved toward them, and evidently did not intend to pause, but his cousin laid a hand on his arm, and he was forced to bend before the young girl.

"Supper is at one," said the Duke, pleasantly. "Come to our table—Mademoiselle, her mother and two or three others." Some one spoke to Petrinac, and a moment later Reizet found himself alone with Sylvia, who looked straight ahead, the corners of her mouth slightly contracted as though she endeavoured not to laugh. The orchestra started a waltz, and common politeness, Reizet felt, compelled him to ask her to dance. In a moment they were floating about the room together. Sylvia felt his strong arm, and the touch of his coat on her bare

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

arm lent an odd sense of intimacy. As they circled the room, Reizet saw Mrs. Bradish staring at them through her lorgnettes, amazement and wrath depicted on her countenance, and a sudden feeling of defiance filled him. Why should he not dance with Mademoiselle Bradish if he chose? If there was condescension in the affair, it lay with him. Madame Bradish should have a lesson.

Not till the last note died away did they pause, and when they did, Jehan made it convenient to stop before a royal personage—a young man of sporting tastes and an old friend. They had yachted and shot together, and it was with conspicuous pleasure that they greeted each other now. His Highness saw that Reizet's partner was charming, and asked that she be presented, and Reizet did so, conscious that Mrs. Bradish was still staring, but no longer with wrath, though surprise still betrayed itself.

The three chatted for a few moments. Then His Highness bowed himself away, and Reizet, with a feeling of recklessness and daring, and with a significant glance toward Mrs. Bradish, said in a dramatic whisper, "Let us fly!"

Sylvia glanced up at him, smiling demurely. "Have you a monoplane in your pocket?"

In some subtle way their former hostility seemed banished, and, with her hand on his arm, Reizet led the way through the crowds till he found two chairs behind a group of palms near the staircase, placed there by a considerate hostess with American ideas on methods of youthful enjoyment. Long fronds drooped, making an entrance to this sylvan retreat. Reizet lifted one and stood still, smiling down on Sylvia's lifted face.

"*Voilà!* Mademoiselle, consider that we have returned from a hayride and that this is the magic wood, where there is silence, mystery and the gleam of fireflies, and that I am

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

one of those perfect products of your civilisation, a man who knows how to be a friend."

Even as he uttered these words, Reizet wondered. Surely they had been spoken by a subconscious self, not he, for it was not thus he had expected to bear himself toward this young woman, whom he had wished to avoid. But when Sylvia drew her hand from his arm, entered, and then looked back with eyes which invited, he followed her with alacrity, feeling that he was playing truant from his real self. They ensconced themselves in two chairs, well screened from passersby, and Sylvia settled a cushion into a comfortable angle, as though she meant to stay.

"You ask me to make believe this is Utica and a wood where Nature has created beauty, but I don't care for make-believe. That taste is purely French. I like real things, real feelings, being in earnest about everything, even pleasure."

Reizet regarded her contemplatively. "Yes. I knew you were like that, and so am I. That is, I don't care much for this sort of thing." He waved his hand toward the outer gallery, where other guests wandered. "What is called society, obliterates personality. One is forced to adapt one's self to so many, that one loses one's own individuality."

"And you wish to remain yourself?" asked Sylvia.

"Yes, Mademoiselle, for am I not answerable for the development of my best capacities? One's individuality is a dignified and important factor, and not to be treated lightly."

Sylvia twirled a rose, put it to her lips and studied it with an absent glance. "But a woman rarely knows what her real self is. With one person, she is one creature; with another, she contradicts everything she may have felt, thought or said, and be sincere in all. I have known those who made of me a serious woman, weighed down by the tragedy of life. And then——" Sylvia paused, and her expression changed from gravity to wistful amusement.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"And then——?" asked Reizet.

"There are others who provoke a certain perversity. Their sense of importance raises opposition in me. They make me—well, what Mother calls impish. I just can't help it."

Reizet leaned forward, elbows on knees. "You find my cousin—important, and you——"

Sylvia nodded. "Yes. He looked so superior this evening that I just couldn't help saying—that national hymn. Of course, it was shocking, and your aunts—they looked so bewildered I was sorry. Mother said—but never mind. You see, it is so easy to be gay. The world is full of so much beauty; there is so much kindness that one can't help but be glad and light-hearted, because one is part of it all, and solemnity arouses contradiction. To me, life seems to hold out both hands full of delightful things, and one forgets the—sighs."

Reizet regarded her for a moment without speaking, wondering how much serious feeling lay behind her words. "And where do you hear the sighs—among the poor?"

Sylvia shook her head, smiling. "No; as I said, I'm perverse. It is the contrasts which make me hear and see more clearly. For instance, the other night we came out of the Ritz, where we had been dining. The room had been filled with the rich. Such jewels! Such gowns! Millions were represented in that crowd of prosperous persons who ate delicate food, sipped costly wines and preened their smart selves for the envy of one another. But with all the softness of lights, voices and smooth luxury, there was—hardness, as though everything beautiful was there but—love: I mean love of humanity. When we came out it was raining. By the door stood an old woman, soaked to the skin. She was hideous, degraded, but she was old and she was crying. Think of it—to be old and unhappy enough to cry! Doesn't that balance the degradation? Well, I made her tell me why she

THE DUKE'S EDUCATION

was there. She had pins for sale, but had sold none, and when she went home her son-in-law would beat her. So I made every one give. Our chauffeur passed his hat around, and we bundled her into a cab, the happiest old wreck you ever saw. Her story was true, because I went the next day and found out. Now, perhaps if I hadn't been in that gay, luxurious Ritz I wouldn't have felt so sympathetic."

"Had you been gay in the Ritz, Mademoiselle?"

"In a way—yes. I love pretty things, smart people, light and music. You see how frivolous I am. But all the time my real self seems to be sitting critically in the corner of my brain, a little bored, and, to tell the truth, feeling a bit lonely and neglected. Really, sometimes its feelings get quite hurt, but I pretend not to notice, and laugh and chatter and try to be amusing. Only, when I get alone, I say to it, 'Now, what's the matter? Tell me all about it.'"

"And what does that real self say is the matter?"

Sylvia shook her head. "Oh! one mustn't betray a confidence."

Reizet sighed aggressively. "Confidences might be shared with a friend. Please remember that we are in that wood where one walks and talks with a—friend. You might introduce me to that real self. It might like my looks. It might say: 'There is a chap who isn't so bad; he at least wants to be decent.' And then——"

Sylvia regarded him gravely, then smiled. "You've forgotten all about Mother."

"Gracious! So I have—and——"

"And the rabbits."

"Alas! Do tell me, now that no one can listen, why does Madame, your mother, so covet my bit of garden?"

"To give parties on—under red umbrellas."

"Suppose I lend it to her occasionally?"

Sylvia rose. "There's the fence. That would irritate her."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Mother's ambitions won't be restricted by any fence, know."

Reizet blocked the exit from the "wood." "But betw you and me, Mademoiselle, can't we ignore the fence? (we pull it down?"

Sylvia tilted her head on one side and glanced abstract over his shoulder. "Perhaps we might burrow under," said.

CHAPTER VIII: MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

It was about this time that Jehan de Reizet began to notice that his vision troubled him, in the oddest way and at the oddest times. When poring through Government estimates at the War Office; when reading the "Matin" in a café; or in the darkness; when drifting to dreamland a girl's face intervened between objects and his thoughts. This face had violet eyes which held both laughter and, in their depths, wistful gravity; a mouth with fresh lips and tender curves, and a small head, carried airily. This vision seemed so real at times that once or twice he could have actually sworn it to be reality. Once, lifting his eyes from the pavement, he was certain that he saw it perched high on a double-deck tram with some one who looked like his brother Jack. Another time, as he passed a kiosk on the Champs Élysées, he fancied he saw this face busied devouring hot gauffers, but a crowd intervened too quickly to identify it. As most of these were hallucinations, he was sure that all were, yet on certain occasions they seemed so very much flesh and blood that he became alarmed and thought seriously of consulting a specialist. As Mademoiselle Bradish had never seen his younger brother and certainly would not perch herself beside him on trams if she did, Reizet decided that overwork had reacted on his nervous system. He, of course, could not ask Jack concerning these mysterious impressions, for well he knew that his aunts would at once be informed, which meant anxious coddlings and awkward questions.

He knew that his cousin Paul frequented the Bradish domi-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

cile, and that Sylvia was frequently seen in his company, not only in the American Colony, but behind the hitherto impregnable barriers of the Faubourg St. Germain. Reizet felt the effect of this invasion, distantly, of course. He came upon traces of Sylvia in round-about ways. Now it was the Princess who informed him that she had been introduced to the delights of the "Boston Baked Bean," tinned by one Monsieur Heinze. Another time he found the Vicomte wildly rocking to and fro in his library in an American rocking-chair, which he explained he had acquired on the recommendation of Mademoiselle Bradish, who said it cured insomnia. On another occasion, when dining with Paul, Margot had entered the dining-room, clothed solely in a fur rug, a fire shovel in one hand and a feather duster bound on her head, claiming to be an Indian chief on the warpath. She offered to scalp Jehan with generous ardour, and when removed, gave a whoop of such realism that the *maitre d'hôtel* poured Burgundy not into Jehan's glass, but into his soup plate.

All this seemed to give Jehan's thoughts a trend which he did his best to overcome. Having heard that an hallucination is often cured by seeing the actual object, he reasoned that it would be wise to try it, and, much to Paul's astonishment, began to call with frequency on Mrs. Morely, but in vain. Evidently the Bradishes did not frequent that lady's domicile, and Reizet was well-nigh discouraged, when one day, as he descended the staircase from her apartment on the rue Monceau, the object of his trouble appeared below him in the hall, waiting for the lift. It was astonishing how he suddenly became terrified lest the lift should engulf mother and daughter before he reached the hall, and great was his chagrin when they entered and the little cage mounted. But he received a bow from Sylvia through the wire grille as she shot upward, enlivened by a smile which seemed to dim the electric light above her. Reizet stood still, trying to control

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

his feet, which seemed bent on remounting the stair. Summoning all his will-power, he at last found himself on the pavement, cursing his ill-luck, and curiously resentful that Paul should descend from a cab and enter, spruce and smart, evidently bent on conquest.

It was a moment pregnant with satisfaction to Mrs. Bradish when she piloted Sylvia into Mrs. Morely's house. A servant relieved them of their heavy wraps, and, leaving the little hall, they passed a room on the left, heavy with silence and cigarette smoke of bridgers, to the larger salon beyond, whence issued voices.

Mrs. Morely stood receiving by the door, slender and perfectly gowned, her long throat encircled by a collar of brilliants. Her husband, face reddened by golf, hovered near. He greeted them with kindness and passed them on as others entered.

Mrs. Bradish stood still a moment, that every one might see that she had "arrived" in that haven of the socially elect. She wore a dark, tailor-made suit, and Sylvia was similarly gowned, as though they had merely run in for a moment, in a friendly way. Near her, in a corner, sat three middle-aged women, one white-haired, with an opulent carriage and pale eyes, which looked as though they had been sharpened by years of contact with her tongue. She stared after the retreating figures of mother and daughter, and turned to the other two.

"I knew Mrs. Bradish would get here," she said, with a tightening of her lips.

"Wonder where she comes from, anyway?" said the other.

"Some mystery, and where there's mystery there is sure to be something queer."

"Husband dead?" queried the third.

The white-haired one smiled icily. "Who knows? She says he is, but I don't know of any one who saw him buried.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

She's probably got two or three scattered about at home. She's too reticent to be quite straight."

"She knows how to give excellent dinners," replied the other. "Clever: for truly the soul of man lieth in his stomach. The last I went to was really quite decent, and she had three Ambassadors, if you please. These foreigners have no more discrimination than children."

"How COULD you go to the Bradishes'?" asked the white-haired one.

"I? Oh! I only go because every one else does, and one hates to be snobbish. Haven't you been asked, dear?"

"Most certainly not. She would not presume——" The speaker leaned forward and lowered her voice confidentially. "They dined with the Duke de Petrinac last week in that famous house of his in the Faubourg St. Honoré. They say he is mad about the girl, and that her mother is wild for the match. Of course, I never gossip, but I've heard that he is naturally after the money, but that the daughter has flirted outrageously with the man, so that he is losing his head about her. He's attractive in a certain way, but every one knows he can be more detestably polite than any man in France. He simply killed his first wife, though they say he kissed her hand charmingly in her coffin. Isn't it disgusting? But it's a sure go. That Mrs. Bradish is the cleverest manager in Paris, and eaten up with ambition."

"How perfectly horrible. What a wicked woman to sacrifice that girl! Well, dears, I want my tea. See you later."

The white-haired one rose and moved away, and her two friendly enemies saw her manoeuvre toward the future duchess skilfully. When out of earshot, the remaining twain smiled significantly at each other. "Watch her," said one. "Such a gossip, but she never misses an opportunity. In a week she'll be dining there: you'll see."

"Who was she, do you know?"

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

"She claims to be a Knickerbocker, but I heard she used to be in the cloak department of a big drygoods shop in New York."

"Fancy that. One can't be too careful. Of course, I go out a little to pass the time, but I never consider myself one of the American Colony."

"Nor I," said the other mechanically, as though from long-established habit. "The Colony has such an undignified reputation. So many queer women in it without antecedents, and so shockingly gossipy. A thing I detest."

Mrs. Bradish found herself with Sylvia standing beside a table covered with plain damask, flowers, and multitudinous edibles. At either end young women in elaborate gowns and large hats dispensed tea and chocolate. Small groups of people stood about talking in highly pitched voices, with great display of cordiality, and a row of women lined the walls, balancing fragile cups with acrobatic skill. A couple of elderly men and a red-haired youth passed cakes and scones with agility. Most of the faces bore evidences of fatigue, the result of ceaseless effort to appear interested when profoundly bored. It was plain that their idea of pleasure was that of convincing others that they were enjoying themselves.

Their daily routine was somewhat similar to that of Mrs. Bradish, though less ornate, as some, living in apartments too restricted for entertaining, were invited only to "teas," a form of entertainment which they decried, but attended with great regularity. There was little real intimacy between them, save that of bridge and food. With few exceptions, they were women of blameless lives, and some few belonged to the best which America produces, who resided in Paris for reasons of economy, desire to forget matrimonial disaster, or for love of that ease and irresponsibility unknown in America's hectic cities.

But a curious condition resulted. Individuals from widely

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

different places and conditions, being ignorant of one another, took it for granted that an unknown past must be objectionable, and many sought to establish themselves on pedestals from which they pulled others. Real kindness toward the successful was as rare as truth; but charity covered a multitude of past offences, if the sinner possessed a *cordon bleu* and a generous bank account.

This society was constantly shifting. Each season new arrivals appeared on the social horizon, from nowhere apparently, leased an apartment, furnished it in original Louis Quatorze or Quinze (from the Bon Marché); through one acquaintance made a hundred, gave a "tea," and by spring had graduated to dinners. Sometimes they returned for another season, but more often disappeared into the limbo from whence they had emerged. If one met them at St. Moritz or Monte Carlo, they admitted having spent a winter in Paris, but hastened to disclaim ever having been a member of the American Colony there.

To a woman like Mrs. Morely, who condoned weaknesses she did not share, this phase had become too familiar to criticise. She had her own small circle of friends, as charming as herself, who from kindness, and an absence of priggishness, allowed their circle to be invaded by lesser lights of the social firmament as long as those lights shed a pure lustre. Also, the cheque books of these aspirants were useful for her charities, and therefore one met sometimes before this shrine of buttered scones and social excellence, individuals who must have been surprised to find themselves there.

Meanwhile Sylvia, having evaded the Duke, was hoping for a word with her hostess. She was aware that Mrs. Morely, with others of her set, made a point to receive few French persons, for she was astute enough to know that those who would wish to come would be influenced solely by the hope of good dinners, free of charge, or would use her salon

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

as a matrimonial bureau for rich American wives. The true and dignified French society, she was equally well aware, would neither desire to know her nor need anything at her hands. She had met specimens of both, and felt unerringly the absence of true assimilation. The Duke's advent after years of casual salutations elsewhere, she understood; for gossip had already informed her of his intentions. Being amiably disposed, she was willing to lend herself to the affair, which was none of her own, though inwardly deploring probable results with which she had become all too familiar.

Jehan de Reizet, however, was quite another proposition. They were old friends, and she was one of the few Americans who had penetrated into his aunts' small circle. But through the years he had never come to her "Days," and on this occasion she had greeted him with ill-concealed surprise, though surmising that he was dutifully playing his part in the matrimonial drama by thus getting in touch with his future cousin-in-law's world. He had remained but a few moments and avoided introductions while gazing about the rooms curiously. He had vouchsafed no explanation of his coming, and declined an invitation to dinner, though she had baited him with a tempting list of names which had not included the Bradishes.

The Duke meanwhile was horribly bored. He despised and disliked his surroundings. Its aristocratic pretensions he found ridiculous, and the atmosphere suffocatingly provincial and feminine. It was surcharged with chastity, and its absence of graceful superficiality to which he was accustomed made him feel as though a ton of granite benumbed his faculties. But he was clever, and allowed himself to be introduced to numberless women, all beautifully gowned, to whom he chatted platitudes with charming animation. His eyes darted hither and thither, absorbing all the petty vanity, pretension, and strained effort toward making an impression. To him,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

these persons, without pasts, unrooted from their proper soil, and vainly endeavouring to blossom without roots in an alien atmosphere, seemed incomprehensible. When one woman spoke of another as "common," he was genuinely at a loss, for were they not all of a kind? Why pretend an aristocracy when there was none, and seek to impress him with such an absurdity? This class of Americans had no excuse for existing. They were neither as amusing as the half-world, nor as intelligent as the rougher types he had occasionally met. Their very consciousness of refinement revealed their inaptitude. He fancied the Princess in such a *milieu*, and smiled. How shocked they would be, and how vulgar she would find their pretensions. In her world one could do, say, and live as one chose without fear of compromising one's position, which was as fixed as the stars. Would one of these women dare to wear white cotton stockings? Perish the thought! Such philistinism would leave her in the outer darkness of snobbism.

And these persons who decried a monarchy and all its evils of caste, purred their pleasure in making his acquaintance. Invitations showered upon him. Most of them gave him his title continually instead of "Monsieur," making him feel as though he was being addressed by servants. The two elderly men and the youth who had so assiduously passed refreshments were left to their own devices as the doves fluttered near this newcomer whose card would look well on their hall tables. Once he caught Mr. Morely's eye, and the fleeting impression that it winked with satirical comprehension, but his host immediately turned away as sober as a bishop. Yet all was done with admirable poise. Only an adept would have detected the suppressed flood of desire which ebbed and flowed about the Duke in that pretty room. Mrs. Bradish was perfectly aware of it, however, and also that the consideration shown her by certain women was due to the fact that his pres-

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

ence there was due to her own. It was a small triumph, a foretaste of a future which she anticipated with satisfaction.

Mrs. Morely at last drew Sylvia down beside her on a small sofa in a corner and laid one fine hand on the girl's with a gesture of intimacy.

"Pardon an old woman's frankness, my dear, but what is a lovely young thing like you doing over here among us grey-heads, instead of playing with nice college boys at home?"

Sylvia was at a loss for a moment. Why, indeed, was she there? She considered for a moment. "I'll tell you," she said simply. "We're here because it would be dull for mother in Utica. This life has spoiled her for church sociables." The girl laughed without bitterness. "Later, when we go back, if we ever do, we'll be in society there, because we're in it here. It's like getting in through a side entrance, you see."

Mrs. Morely was highly amused by this frankness, and liked the girl's honest disregard of pretence. As she was about to reply, the Duke bowed before her to take his leave, explaining, with eyes on Sylvia's, that he had an engagement at his club to make a fourth at bridge. As the girl watched his well-tailored back disappear, she wondered; for it was customary for him to avail himself of their motor and a half-hour's tête-à-tête with her afterward, during which she never failed to do her best to charm. That she succeeded was proved by the fact that the Duke found those interviews astonishingly amusing—even replete with excitement, and at times he wondered whether indeed Jehan was not right in fancying that the girl had capacities which he had failed to suspect.

"I hear," said Mrs. Morely, "that you are getting to know some of the good French society—a rare thing for an Anglo-Saxon. Indeed, a little bird has just whispered of a—duke——"

Sylvia flushed with annoyance, but spoke with restraint.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Oh! mother likes to sample the best while she is about it, and I find they have great kindness."

"They have prejudices also, and opinions, but a French woman would no sooner allow one frankly to see the light of day than leave her nose unpowdered. She conceals everything, even her heart."

"Has she one?"

"I fancy only for her children. Otherwise, she has only emotions, and she plays with those as does a child with bubbles. And you, my child, you'll marry a Frenchman, I suppose, and be a—duchess?"

Sylvia shook her head. "It would never do, as I'm so old-fashioned as to find emotions inadequate. And I wouldn't mind in the least being an old maid if I could be like two doves of old maids I met the other night." Sylvia told of the dinner, and incidentally of her mother's quarrel with Jehan de Reizet.

"I know him well," said the listener. "He is one of the few Frenchmen I know without vices and possessing serious ambitions. And I can tell you why he is unwilling to sell your mother his house and land. It isn't obstinacy or desire for a higher bid, but purely a sentiment, and a fine one. It is because his old aunts cling to their home, and it would break their hearts to leave it. Personally he would be glad to rid himself of the old place, which eats up an absurd amount in taxes and repairs. He is not rich, and what he would get by its sale would rid him of many anxieties. He is the most unselfish of men, and denies himself everything to educate his younger brother and give those sweet, old souls their accustomed luxuries. Why not tell your mother this and end the foolish quarrel?"

Sylvia was silent. How could she explain that to the inventor of the "Idea" sentiment in connection with business was as incongruous as a rose in a glass of beer? Her mother

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

would merely think him a fool, instead of a knave. Sylvia winced as she realised what Reizet had borne from them. He must have considered her mother and herself incapable of appreciating the true situation when he refrained from imparting to them a reason which would have been respected by fine souls. She resented his evident opinion of them, and for a moment hated him. Yet she knew, below her anger, that her mother's insistence, her arrogant assurance that if the price offered was sufficiently high it could buy anything she desired, had given Reizet the right to estimate them as persons to whom money was all, and the wishes or predilections of others, nothing. Also, had not their persistence expressed their belief that he was merely a sharper, taking advantage of a situation to extort an unreasonable sum from rich purchasers? It had been an ignoble situation, but it had been they, and not he, who had brought it about.

It was significant of Sylvia's nature that she classed herself loyally with her mother in the affair, though she had shared no part in it. As they were undoubtedly one in Reizet's mind, so Sylvia considered them to be in her own thoughts, for what was done was invariably done directly or indirectly for her, as she well knew. It obligated her sharing what was unpleasant as well as benefits accrued, yet in this case a sense of shame and regret, unusual as it was unpleasant, weighed down her wrath. She recalled the shabby high-swung barouche in which the twins took the air behind tiny sunshades which bent on their sticks. She remembered that Reizet's evening dress had been out-of-date as to cut; yet Jack was always smartly turned out and rode his pony in the Bois. She had never seen Reizet ride—because a horse was lacking?

Doubtless strenuous economy was carried on beneath that ancient roof, yet were they not richer in a sense than was she? No struggle to attain consideration there; no chasing of shadows, pretence and heart-burnings. They did not hold out

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

hands laden with bribes to society—feeing those who despised them and whom they despised. How aloof from her life they were in their simplicity and repose. She regretted her persiflage the evening of Petrinac's dinner, for Jack had justly expressed their attitude when they had compared her to a pretty piece of fire-work, likely to flash into nothingness at any moment. Doubtless Reizet was studying her, amused and critical. She was a type of everything of which he disapproved, yet desired to know, as he would any novelty. Well, two could play at that game, and she would inform him in ways he little anticipated. In fact, she had already begun his education, for they met frequently now in French houses, where, partly to annoy Petrinac and partly from pure mischief, she invariably intimated that she found his society agreeable. When her mother remonstrated she agreed that Reizet was detestable, but that tact demanded civil treatment as a possible "future-in-law," and that it was better to have his approval than disapproval, insignificant as he was. Mrs. Bradish could find no fault with this as long as Reizet did not attain to her visiting list, and, as Sylvia was even more charming to the Duke, she fancied that all tended toward the culmination of her hopes.

Mrs. Morely was now surrounded by other guests who wished to make their adieus, and, as Mrs. Bradish appeared, Sylvia rose. The former was well in hand, and with admirable self-restraint refrained from mention of future meeting, though mindful of a future invitation to a dinner which would include persons her hostess would be pleased to meet.

Meanwhile Petan had remained waiting outside in the automobile, observing those who passed in and out with interest. What was her amazement to see suddenly emerging from those portals the hero of her midnight adventure. He came upon her so suddenly that she almost hailed him through the open window, but mindful of the footman who stood with others on the pavement, sable rug folded on his arm, she happily

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

checked the impulse and watched her hero stride away into the twilight with palpitating emotions. Who could he be? Had he also been a guest of Mrs. Morely? Had he perchance made the acquaintance of her Sylvia? Vague hopes and tremors left her tremulous with excitement and curiosity. Without doubt Mrs. Bradish would remain half an hour, therefore there was time to investigate matters. In a trice Petan was within the snug room of the concierge, whose wife received her with the respect due her neat air of prosperity, and offered her a seat on a chair covered with terra-cotta plush, while busying herself within a smaller room, whence issued the odour of cooking.

In spite of Petan's excitement, discretion remained. She first explained that she awaited one who took tea with Madame Morely, which at once vouched for her own social distinction. She then complimented her hostess on the polish of her parquet, the beauty of her son who so resembled his mother, though in a high chair imbibing milk from a flowered mug; and lastly, on the excellence of the apartment house which doubtless sheltered other persons of distinction beside Madame Morely.

The concierge's wife met these blandishments in a proper spirit, and volubly explained that each floor was tenanted by entirely respectable persons, though naturally the upper floors by more humble tenants.

"I trust all are of an age which tends toward domesticity?" queried Petan.

"All families, save one," replied her hostess. "He is a most worthy young man, who has three rooms in the mansard, and is salesman in the well-known 'Magasin des 1000 Chemises,' where he sells gentlemen's haberdashery."

Petan's high hopes fell. "I doubtless beheld him going out," she said in a voice which was a question.

"Perhaps, as it is Saturday, he is here usually at this hour."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Petan rolled her eyes toward the ceiling. "Ah!" she said feelingly, "as I also have a son alone in a strange city" (she had nothing of the kind) "I feel an interest in all such gallant youths who struggle for fortune. This young man is comely?"

"Tastes differ. Doubtless the women who love him find him so. He is of decent height and his bones are not buried in fat. Economy is the best guarantee of a figure remaining chic. He has no beard and his eyes can laugh——"

Petan, convinced that her hero and this devotee of haberdashery were one and the same, rose, a certain castle which she owned in Spain tumbling to the ground. For once her perspicacity had erred, for she had fancied her hero had evinced high breeding in appearance, speech, and manner.

"Madame, you describe the very double of my own son," she said. "Alas! it so moves me that I am no longer able to enjoy this otherwise delightful conversation. I beg you to accept my thanks for this warmth and hospitality, for without the chill penetrates the bones. I make my adieus."

The wife of the concierge wiped her hands on her checked apron and opened the door with empressment, touched by this display of maternal feeling, and saw Petan retire within the very splendid motor. A moment later the Duke came forth and Petan saw him pause, consult a little red memorandum book, look about hastily and furtively, hail a cab, and disappear down the Avenue in the direction of the left bank of the Seine. She, like Sylvia, wondered that he had left before Mrs. Bradish, to expend cab fare when a motor awaited. Was he going again to the Bon Marché to buy more "Ideas"?

Petan still clung to a faint hope that her hero might have been another than the young man of the mansard, and decided to pump Mrs. Bradish as to the masculine guests of Mrs. Morely. A few moments later the two ladies descended, and Mrs. Bradish directed the footman to a certain shop, where superior hair ornaments were to be found, on the other side

of the river. As they spun down the Champs Élysées, Petan ventured to enquire whether the company had been of an interesting quality, and lastly what Frenchman they had encountered, to which Sylvia had replied that a kindly Fate had eliminated such from the reception, with the exception of the Duke, which reply pleased her mother, and convinced Petan, who knew not that Reizet had merely passed them on the stair. She therefore accepted the young man who sold chemises as one with her hero, and docketed him as but another proof of the fallacy of judging by appearance.

As they whirled down the Champs Élysées, Mrs. Bradish called their attention to strange pools of water on the right, where grass should have been. They lay motionless and sinister, reflecting the bare trees in their shallow depths, troubled only by moisture which dripped from the trees. It had been raining most of the day, as usual, and above those pools the sky held vast clouds, piled high. Parisians had commenced to realise that past months of almost continuous rain might mean something more than vague paragraphs in their morning papers. Houses along the banks of the Seine at Asnières and Puteaux had been forsaken, and even the railroad trains ran over submerged tracks.

At the Rond Point, Sylvia reached for the speaking tube, for she had a rendezvous with Jack and had no intention of missing it. She pleaded lack of interest in hair ornaments and desire for a walk, and descended, waved good-bye to those within, and found her way to the corner where stood the Grand Palais. Was she too late? The avenue was a dizzying whirl of moving vehicles. At its end loomed the Arc de Triomphe against a stormy sky, pierced by shafts of watery sunlight. Pedestrians were few. Sodden leaves were piled into pyramids among dank trees, and little iron chairs were scattered here and there, tenantless. Sylvia looked about and sighed with relief. Jack was there, tossing gravel into one of those

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

sinister pools, which already seemed deeper than a few moments before.

He turned, saw Sylvia, ran forward, and kissed her gloved fingers.

"I was most awfully afraid you weren't coming," he said, "and thought of drowning myself in that lake. Where shall we go? I know—inside the Palais. No one we know ever looks at statues, and we can talk."

At the entrance Jack manfully declined to be paid for, and deposited his own two francs for Sylvia and himself before the gate-keeper. A moment later they found themselves in the vast space beneath a glass dome through which a pale-grey light filtered. Below were earthen paths bordered here and there by box or grass, and all about were white, still figures, grotesque or beautiful, upholding French traditions of Art. They found a bench near a fountain where marble fauns and dryads chased one another through foliage. A workman in a blue blouse, corduroy trousers, and sabots swept the path with a broom of twigs, and somewhere a band played "*Je Sais que Vous êtes jolie*." Persons with blue-covered guide-books passed infrequently, peering at statues, and ignoring the twain on the bench.

Jack pushed back his top hat with a gesture of content "It's bully to see you again. It's been three days since we went up the river on the boat, and I was frightened for fear you'd caught cold, or that your mother had caught on."

"Not a bit of it. I am behaving so nicely to your august relative, the Duke, that mother gives me more rope than usual. Your brother, I saw this afternoon at Mrs. Morely's as out of place among those chattering parroquets as——"

"Jehan said something funny about you," said Jack.

"About me?"

"Yes. You'd sat near him at the Vicomte's dinner the other

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

night, and Jehan said you were different from what he'd expected, in some ways."

"The question is, what did he expect?"

Jack laughed. "It's a great game. He hasn't the remotest idea that we know each other. He says what he thinks to the aunts right before me. I sit there, digging my pump toes into the rug, rolling my eyes as though bored, but whew! my ears grow right out from my head with listening. He's down on your marrying Paul."

"Really," sniffed Sylvia. "Who asked his opinion or leave, and why is he down on it?"

"Says you'll upset precedents and disturb the dignity of the family. Yet, and here is the funny part of it, once Aunt Agathe said about the same thing and he got quite peppery. Said it was a shame to sacrifice a young, feather-brained girl to Paul's ambitions. You see, he really doesn't know what he does think——"

"And nobody cares," said Sylvia. "What else did he say?"

"That you had pretty hair."

"Oh!"

"And intelligent eyes, and that you had a way with you."

"More than one, if he but knew," smiled Sylvia. "And what did your aunts say?"

"That they found you adorable, but when you talked to them at Paul's, that you were rather alarming. They are dears, my aunts. They just long to pet anything young or lonesome."

"But I'm not lonesome."

"Jehan said you were. He said you had it in your eyes, and that he'd like to ship you straight back to America, where you belong."

"What a hospitable young man!"

"I told him that the best thing to do was to marry you himself."

Sylvia whirled on the bench. "You didn't. You——"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Well, rather. But you needn't be frightened. He didn't like the idea any more than you do. He said nothing and heaven would induce him to."

"Oh! he did, did he? Your brother is just the most detestable, stupid—er——"

"Precisely, and I told him so. But, Sylvia, he didn't mean because when Aunt Cecile agreed with him he got quite angry and declared no one understood you but him, and that you deserved sympathy, not blame. Poor Aunt Cecile looked quite bewildered, and Aunt Agathe said he wasn't well and needed a tisane. I believe she's right, for lately he certainly has been queer. He goes to parties—a thing he never used to do—and sometimes he comes home as jolly as a sand-boy, and sometimes in the dumps."

"Ahem!" murmured Sylvia. "That's when he runs against me. You see, I'm educating him——"

"In what?"

Sylvia prodded the earth with her umbrella and nodded sagely. "Oh! in a number of things. He'll be a lot wiser when I've done. I'm really rather busy these days, for I'm teaching the Duke some little things, too, though he thinks he's informing my untutored mind. But, though he doesn't know it, he's—well—getting bitten. He abhors our new dances—thinks Tango vulgar, but I'm putting him through his paces. You should see me turkey-trot him around mother's salon, with our Petan as audience. His wind isn't any too good, and he puts on like a grampus, but vows that to dance with me is ecstasy. And then—he has his reward. I look into his eyes—so—he puts a carnation into his buttonhole—so—and then—and then he——"

"You look solemn," said Jack. "You've a frown on. How does he look when——?"

"That's just it," sighed Sylvia. "He gets a devouring look. He glances at Petan to see if she is looking. She always

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

or I'm sure he'd pounce and take a bite. Petan says I must be careful not to educate him too far——"

Sylvia paused suddenly, her eyes fixed and wide with consternation. Jack followed her gaze and saw coming toward them his brother and an elderly man, both deeply interested in a blue print which the former held before them. Not far behind walked an old man, shabbily dressed, a cap pulled down over unkempt grey hair. Jack was about to flee, but Sylvia laid a swift hand on him. "Don't stir," she breathed. "It is our only chance. If we move, they'll look. Shhh!"

Both remained rigid as the unconscious men approached. Leizet was on the side of the path nearest them, and his face was mercifully turned away. They walked slowly, while Sylvia held her breath. But in spite of her suspense she noted their gravity, and wondered if they too had chosen that place and hour because they wished to avoid notice. When they were twenty feet beyond, Jack stood up. "Whew!" he ejaculated softly. "That was a narrow shave. Do you know who that man was with Jehan?"

"No!" said Sylvia. "But he had a grim face."

"It was Monsieur Randon, Minister of War. Wonder what they're up to."

Sylvia threw her fur boa into place and rose. "None of my business, Jackie boy. I'm off. It always irritates me, hiding like this as though we were doing something to be ashamed of. What a pity mother won't call on your aunts. I've needed and pled, but in vain. To get mother to change her mind is like making water run uphill."

Jack hailed a cab, for rain had again begun to descend. When the door closed, Sylvia leaned from the window. "By the way," she said casually, "if that brother of yours makes any more remarks about me, just remember them and pass them on. It might—er—assist me in his education."

Jack clung to the little hand on the sill. "Hang Jehan!

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Don't you bother about him. Oh, it will be an age to Sunday and the Nouveau Cirque. I adore thee."

Sylvia waved good-bye. "And I thee, my Jack. Adieu."

Meanwhile Mrs. Bradish, with Petan, had crossed the Pont Alexandre and bidden the chauffeur pause on the Quai d'Orsay. As far as the eye could reach on either side they saw the low, stone parapet lined by human beings who stood silently bent forward, watching the river below, swollen and ominously quiet. No traffic disturbed its sullen flow. That usually teeming thoroughfare was as forsaken as though it swept through a desert. No boat could now pass beneath its bridges, where the water had mounted to within a few feet of the key-stones. The tops of trees swayed above submerged quais, and now and again a bit of furniture, a dead dog, or debris swirled past, to be sucked under by the swift current. Parisians, no longer gay, leaned fearfully over the parapet, watching that resistless flood creep ever higher. Where was it to stop? Once over that barrier, Paris lay at its mercy.

Both women were silent as the motor turned into the rue de Bac and from there into a side street, but here they found their way barred by a gendarme, who guarded a barricade of bags filled with sand, built across from house to house. Beyond them, a few yards of cobble stones were visible, and over these came creeping little streams of water from what appeared to be a canal beyond. Petan looked at it with astonishment, realising for the first time the menace of what it represented. Down the centre of this tranquil canal, which the day before had been a crowded thoroughfare, boats were gliding piled with furniture and escaping inhabitants. Passing glimpses of other side streets revealed other canals, traversed by frail bridges made of planks supported by barrels or boxes. From the windows on either side anxious faces peered, and through one aperture on the second floor people were descending by a ladder to the boat below.

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

Mrs. Bradish shivered in her furs as she looked through the window, dimmed by rain.

"Petan," she said weakly, "the very foundations of Paris are being decimated. Those canals prove it. The walls hold back the Seine now, but the waters are creeping through crevices in the masonry, under streets and houses, into cellars and upward. It terrifies me; it's so stealthy and still."

Petan smoothed the rug over Mrs. Bradish's knees with a soothing hand. "Fret not, Madame. There still remains the summits of the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe on which we may take refuge. It will be the first bath those cellars have had for three hundred years."

They had reached a place where the street was choked by traffic, and were obliged to halt for a moment in front of a shabby café. Before its dingy windows were two rusted iron tables beneath a frayed and flapping awning, and on the open window's sill a cat sat licking its paws. Just beyond stood an automobile of the racing type, painted grey, and spattered with mud. Evidently it had travelled far and rapidly. The chauffeur, too, bore evidences of arduous travel. A waiter in white apron and short black jacket came out from the café with a foaming glass of beer, which the chauffeur took and with a detaining hand on the waiter, drained almost at one gulp and signed for another. Evidently he could speak no French, but the waiter understood. Petan's eyes followed him into the café, and suddenly she leaned forward.

Within, reflected distinctly in a mirror, she discerned the Duke's profile. It was unmistakable. The very incongruity of that distinguished head, sleek, pointed beard, and clean-cut outline in such grimy surroundings made it all the more noticeable. He was leaning over the marble-topped table, on which stood an empty beer mug and a glass half filled with absinthe, talking earnestly to his companions, who listened with narrowed eyes as he smoked a pipe with a tiny bowl

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

and a stem nearly a foot long. He was apparently very tall and leanly built and his head was large and domed, with dark hair brushed without parting from a forehead bespeaking intellectual capacities. He was smooth shaven, and down one cheek ran a scar. Some papers lay between the two men in which they were absorbed. Neither saw Mrs. Bradish's motor outside, and some instinct forbade Petan to speak of her discovery to her mistress.

Petan had no inclination for the Duke's company homeward, which certainly would have occurred had Mrs. Bradish known of his proximity. They were not in sympathy regarding the Duke, though Mrs. Bradish was totally unaware of that fact, such had been Petan's discretion. But the effort to keep her mouth closed upon all but encomiums when Mrs. Bradish discussed that gentleman taxed Petan's self-control and proved fatiguing. She had no real fact to his detriment to bring forward save the discovery of his evident knowledge as to the origin of the "Idea," which, after all, was no crime, whereas Mrs. Bradish could give many reasons why he should be considered with respect. Yet, as a cat scents rain, so did Petan fancy she scented perfidy when in that gentleman's company, and she smothered a sigh of relief when the motor chortled itself into motion once more, and they left the little café behind. But her homeward drive was not to be without alloy. Mrs. Bradish, for some days, had desired a quiet talk with her trusted Petan, and found this an excellent opportunity. Being much occupied herself, confidences between herself and Sylvia were rare; at least she liked to hoodwink herself into believing that this was the cause of the girl's reticence regarding intimate matters. She was invariably sweet and docile, but her mother had felt that something was evaded. Their lives flowed on among common interests and occupations, hectic, perhaps, devoid of mysteries, and Mrs. Bradish congratulated her-

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

self that the one for whom she had striven was tasting to the full the luxuries and pleasures of youth.

Beneath Mrs. Bradish's somewhat sharp exterior there was deep love, tinged by jealousy, for her daughter, and of this latter quality Petan was aware. As is often the case, Sylvia gave superficially more confidence to Petan than to her parent, and the former fully realised that Mrs. Bradish would bitterly resent this if she found it out. To Sylvia, Petan was an accommodating cushion on which she could lay her troubled head without fear of rebuff or criticism; whereas with her mother, a will stronger than her own, backed by desires she did not share, would be met and have to be overcome. Petan had inculcated the axiom that, in meeting an obstacle, it is wiser to go round it than to butt into it, and Sylvia skilfully accomplished this feat without her mother suspecting it.

Petan, to her best knowledge and belief, had never seen Monsieur de Reizet, for she had no reason in the world to identify him with the perfect knight of her midnight adventure. She knew Mrs. Bradish had met him, and, not trusting entirely to Sylvia's description, which was vague, she desired, above all things, to learn what manner of man he might be to whom her adored protégée had given her heart. Therefore she decided that, after all, this tête-à-tête might be used to advantage.

Mrs. Bradish pushed back her veil and settled back against her cushion.

"At last, my Petan," she said confidently, "we can talk quietly. There is much I want to say and ask. My daughter, as you know, is the *clou* of my existence, and all that concerns her interests me. But a young girl's heart and mind are often reticent to those who are nearest and dearest. Tell me, is she becoming fond of Petrinac? You know I would not have her marry against her will, but"—and Mrs. Bradish's small

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

face looked at set as granite—"I will not have her marry against mine. Your French method is wiser than ours. Divorces are rare where a parent judges a man's capacity for making a child happy. The Duke is entirely unobjectionable morally, has a great name and position, and, with money, could carry on his career, for which he is well fitted. He has heart, for does not his love for that waif prove it? His manners are admirable, and politeness, combined with a bank account, goes farther in marriage than sentimental endearments. My husband loved me, but he never opened a door or put a cushion behind my back in his life, and—well, a woman misses such things. Sylvia would have them from Petrinac always, even though he might develop an *amitié amoureuse* around the corner. In the latter case, he'd never let Sylvia know it, and what matters to a wife, if she does not know? In America husbands have them, lie about them, and are found out, and then—such a hullabaloo. Horrid ways we have in some things."

"Doubtless," replied Petan, "it is wiser to be wretched quietly than noisily, but it's better to be happy than either."

"Precisely," agreed Mrs. Bradish, "and for that reason I should be happy myself if I thought my daughter was learning to love."

Petan thought quickly. Why not give Madame Bradish that happiness? Mrs. Bradish longed for Sylvia to love. Sylvia loved. *Voilà tout!* It was not fitting to mention names in polite society, therefore she would mention none. Petan sighed sentimentally. "If my judgment and opinion be of any value," she said, "I may say that your daughter does feel the most tender emotions of that character; in fact, I fully believe she loves."

Mrs. Bradish turned to her companion, but twilight obscured her vision, and she touched the button, so that sud-

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

denly the interior was illuminated. Petan blinked, but kept her face in control.

"My dear Petan," cried the delighted Mrs. Bradish, "do you really mean it? You make me so happy. Why do you feel sure?"

Petan trembled and took the plunge. "For the best of reasons. She has tacitly admitted it." And then, as she saw Mrs. Bradish was about to demand details, and aware of her jealousy where her daughter was concerned, Petan hedged: "Not in words, precisely, Madame, but my eyes are sharp, and a young maid's powers of concealment are not what ours are. She betrays herself in a thousand charming ways——"

"Oh! Sylvia's ways," sighed Mrs. Bradish. "I know 'em. You haven't seen what I have seen. She flirts, yes—abominably, with both the Duke and even with that cousin of his, Monsieur de Reizet. She plays with them as would a kitten with two balls of worsted. Men are such fools, they actually seem to like it, though it doesn't engender love between them, I fancy. Of course Reizet is intelligent enough, I hope, to understand that is just her 'way,' for she has no liking for that young man."

Now was Petan's chance and she availed herself of it.

"Pardon my curiosity, Madame, but might I ask what manner of man he might be, personally? You are quite right in saying Mademoiselle has no—er—liking for him. Her feeling for him I have reason to know is a stronger sentiment——"

"Precisely," said Mrs. Bradish. "She detests him as much as I do. As for him, he is a stern and lean person, with a manner of politeness so perfect that one feels as though he were speaking to a servant."

This description failed to tally with Petan's own impression, and certainly not with Sylvia's; still less with that of the wife of the concierge concerning the young man who sold haberdashery, and Petan wondered. Mrs. Bradish was not enam-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

oured, and therefore doubtless saw things more accurately than Sylvia. Could it be possible that the being whose curls Sylvia had brazenly patted through a fence be a stern and lean person such as Mrs. Bradish described? Petan longed to see him with her own eyes more than she dared say, for others' personal opinion is worth little, being coloured by personal prejudice for or against. Doubtless both Sylvia and her mother were wrong, and Petan felt that her own dragon's eye alone could properly gauge that mysterious young man. She was startled by Mrs. Bradish's next remark.

"What you have told me clarifies the situation. The Duke has been most patient and considerate, and refrained from bringing matters to a crisis, for at one time I felt that he was antagonistic to Sylvia, and therefore I urged him to wait and—woo. He has proved his unselfish devotion by doing both. He has been charming, and has forced nothing. But now perhaps he should strike while the iron is hot, for Sylvia has a way of changing her mind. She may get bored, and that would be fatal. It is easier, my Petan, to get flame from smouldering straw than a spark from ashes. I'll speak to the Duke——"

Petan was terrified by this sudden threat of action. She ventured to lay one black-gloved hand on Mrs. Bradish's knee.

"Caution, Madame, caution. Test not on the strength of an edifice until the cement is solid. Doubtless our precious Sylvia has allowed her fancy to be caught because she felt untrammelled. Let her be confronted with the gravity of the situation and she might flee. She is of a high and fine spirit and must be allowed to put the halter on her own neck. Let another approach with it, and you'll see her pretty heels. Patience. The Duke is becoming more and more enamoured, and it is healthy for him. He has hitherto loved with his emotions. He now begins to love with his heart, and, while bewildered by the strangeness of symptoms, knows not their

MRS. BRADISH "ARRIVES"

cause. A hook well emplanté is worth more than a dozen skin-deep."

"Perhaps you are right," said Mrs. Bradish thoughtfully, turning out the light. "There is the future to be reckoned with, and if he learns now that she cannot be lightly won, he may cherish her more, once his."

When they reached home Petan went at once to her room, feeling rather tremulous, for she had been skating on thin ice. Her room was on the third floor, and, like her, neat, and at the first glance, severe. The floor was bare and the walls white. A small mat lay beside the single brass bed, and prayer books on the table proclaimed her devotions. The furniture she had selected herself, and its Spartan simplicity of outline and upholstery cleverly concealed supreme comfort. The same contradictory elements of her character were betrayed by her dressing table, where were arrayed all the perquisites of a coquette's toilette. Silver-topped bottles filled with powders and creams; manicure implements and a pincushion of frivolous lace and satin bows illumined its glass-covered top. On the bureau stood a statue of the Virgin in a pale blue mantle, and above it on the wall were two bits of dried palm above a rosary which Mrs. Bradish had given her, blessed by the Pope.

Petan lit the electric lights, drew the creton curtains, and removed her jacket, brushing it carefully and hanging it within the commodious closet on a padded support. Her veil she stretched and rolled with economical carefulness and placed it within a pink satin sachet scented with heliotrope. Her round hat was brushed and put on a shelf, and a moment later, as she was buttoning the front of her wrapper, a knock sounded on the door. A maid entered and handed Petan a note in Sylvia's handwriting. Just these few words:

"What's up with mother? She came to my room, kissed my brow; murmured, 'Me choild! Me choild!' like a tragedy

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

actress, and clasped me to her new Paquin bodice. But her eye had a gleam, Petan! The Duke is coming to go to hear 'Madame Butterfly' with us. Oh, Petan! . . . Burrregh. . . . 'HE' was such a darling this afternoon among the stuck-up statues of the Grand Palais. Burn this.

"P. S.—It's so sweet to hear him say: 'I adore thee,' and to know he means it."

Petan perused these lines thrice, then lit her night candle and watched the missive burn. Her lips moved softly, repeating Mrs. Bradish's words. "It is easier to get flame from smouldering straw than a spark from ashes!"

She swept the grey dust into a bit of paper, opened the window and blew them into the darkness.

CHAPTER IX: A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

AUNT CECILE and Aunt Agathe lay high on their pillows in the great bed beneath its emblazoned and faded canopy, their heads in frilled nightcaps. One candle's steady flame revealed the walls panelled in yellow satin damask which matched the curtains and furniture, every piece of which had had its duplicate. Two dressing tables stood side-by-side between the long windows. In each corner there was a little altar embellished with old lace, and a crucifix of yellowed ivory surmounted it, flanked by images of St. Joseph and Mary, kneeling in adoration. Two *priedieux* were before the altars, covered with frayed blue velvet, each embroidered with a monogram in gold bullion.

For seventy years had the twain thus slept in that great bed, watching the same moonlight creep across the polished floor to mount to the feet of Guido Reni's Christ which hung opposite them. Only the shadows had deepened and spread on the floor from the branches outside, sometimes quivering as though afraid of the glooming night; sometimes, as to-night, they lay still, like ebony lace touched with silver. Each sister had seen the other's face soften and fade with passing years. Girlish beauty had changed to maturity, and then to old age, gaining peace, and a beauty which shone from within as light through alabaster. Purity of soul had preserved charm, till one no longer regretted that youth had passed when it left as hostage such a shrine for things fine and lovely.

To-night both were awake, though their abigail Tontine had long ago tucked them in bed with admonitions against

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

allowing certain information which she had imparted to disturb their rest.

Cecile spoke in a hushed voice: "Sister, dost thou believe it? Perhaps Tontine was mistaken."

"She said she heard their voices plainly, and that they seemed to come from the windows high above the area which divides our house from that of Madame Bradish."

"But I cannot believe that our good servant Philippe, young though he be, could lightly hold converse with one of the opposite sex at such an hour as midnight. Yet Tontine said it was not the first time. She, too, liked not to believe the evidences of her ears merely, lest injustice be done."

"But, Agathe, something must be decided. Harm may come to the maid. I have seen her—a foolish young thing with a waist like the stem of a pipe. We must act."

"But how?"

"We want proof. We must get it. We must not rely on Tontine's imagination in so important a matter. I feel that it is our duty to prove the truth of this affair, not only by hearing, but seeing for ourselves."

Agathe stirred under the bedclothes apprehensively, for she disliked issues.

"Thou would have us go up to the roof as did Tontine? Mon Dieu! We might fall off, and surely it would be unseemly."

"There is a stone coping all around that roof, chérie. Come! courage! Duty is rarely pleasant, hence it is a discipline, and thou knowest that discipline is ever salutary."

"But the night is damp——"

"And warm. For once, rain falls not. And though we catch a *bronchite*, we may prevent the devil catching a soul."

"True," murmured Agathe, and, like Cecile, getting out of bed, she thrust her feet into stockings and felt slippers. They moved carefully, as though fearful of detection, and a few

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

moments later the two venerable ladies, still in their nightcaps, quilted satin petticoats, dressing jackets and fur-trimmed pelisses, softly opened their door and stole forth. The passage was dimly lit, and they had to grope their way up a tiny stairway to the mansard roof. Never before had they seen its flat zinc covering, and it gave them the impression of foreign travel as they crept along, stooping low for fear of passers-by in the street beyond their garden walls. Trees stood motionless, and the moon showed palely luminous in the deep vault above.

They reached the distant corner designated by their abigail, hand-in-hand, terrified, yet tingling with excitement. Suddenly the profound silence was broken by human speech. The sisters strained their ears, fear forgotten in shocked certainty. But alas! no words were distinguishable; only a faint murmur and once the ripple of stifled laughter.

Never was there a more trying situation. They could not pounce out upon the guilty pair, for their petticoats were too short. They could discern nothing of the fair enslaver from their vantage ground, for she was on the other side of the area, but they could distinctly note the feminine quality of her voice and its timbre of airy gaiety. The listeners were horrified yet helpless, and no wiser than before, for although they could hear a masculine whisper they had no proof that it was Philippe. Suppose it should prove to be the staid butler who had thus fallen from grace, for a beguiling female could charm age as well as youth. He was a married man, and the eavesdroppers suddenly glimpsed domestic upheaval, mingled with the dire tragedy of losing a cook who had made for them *mousse de jambon* for thirty years.

The night chill penetrated their scanty attire, and by mutual impulse they turned to descend, when, from the skylight on their neighbour's roof a head emerged, surmounted by a row of diminutive pink bows attached to curling pins. Below them

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

appeared a familiar face and a pink satin peignoir. It was Mrs. Bradish.

The old ladies crouched back in the shadow, praying that their white night caps might not reveal their presence. So she also was on the scent. The naughty jade would meet punishment without their aid. They saw Mrs. Bradish emerge, creep near the edge of the roof, clutching her garments about her, peer and listen, and then with a gesture of passionate discouragement, retreat whence she had come. The last pink bow disappeared; the skylight closed and presently the twins also crept toward their exit. Alas! the sinners were still unidentified.

As they stole past Jack's door they fancied they heard a sound from within, but as all was darkness, decided that their nerves were unstrung, and gained their own room, a prey to uncertainty and chagrin. Sleep was out of the question, and they decided to await Jehan's return, that he might be informed and his advice be solicited. To this end, Cecile sought pen and paper, and in her painstaking hand a missive was indited and, armed with this, she again set forth into the darkness and, having gained Jehan's room, placed it conspicuously on his dressing table. On his return he would thus learn that they awaited his presence in their chamber on a matter of grave import.

An hour later, Jehan found them, bolt upright in bed, modestly clutching the covering about their shoulders. He stood at the foot of their couch, his overcoat revealing his evening dress, open note in hand. He looked very big and dependable to four old eyes, as they told their tale, concealing no harrowing detail.

Jehan listened, his mind working rapidly, for he was cognisant of things of which they were ignorant. He recalled Jack's midnight epistle, his unusual devotion to his toilette, and most of all, those visual hallucinations of his own when he had

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

fancied seeing Jack and the American together on top of a tram. Moreover Jack had been unusually cheerful when his brother had departed for social functions. It had not always been thus. His mind flew to that American girl next door. She was quite capable of this, and more. The jade! What imp of mischief hid beneath those coils of shining hair? But it would never do to betray Jack to the aunts.

He therefore expressed proper indignation for the guilty ones, admiration for the twins' courage and discretion, but counselled caution, and the wisdom of leaving the matter entirely in his own hands to adjust. The twins, only too relieved to be rid of so complicated and delicate a matter, agreed, and Jehan bade them an affectionate good-night.

Outside Jack's door he paused, listening, but all was still. Jehan grinned in the darkness, shaking a finger at the oak panelling, and went on to his room.

The following day Jack's bland self-possession proved to his elder brother how seasoned was he in deceit and shameless effrontery. When Jehan asked how he had slept, the boy replied with aplomb that his rest had been all that could be desired, though he yawned in the middle of the sentence twice.

That evening Jack was surprised and chagrined to find his brother prone to domesticity. Promptly at nine, Jehan suggested that he retire and reluctantly he did so. But in his room he refrained from undressing and sat in darkness until ten, when he heard the aunts and Jehan mount the stairs and go to their respective rooms. Half an hour later Jack softly opened his door, when, to his unspeakable wrath, he discovered his brother's door wide open, and he within, fully dressed, reading. Softly Jack closed his door again and waited another half hour, when again he ventured a peep. Jehan was still here, as though he had taken root in that chair and had no intention of ever seeking his bed. Jack gave it up and sulkily undressed and went to bed. But so deep was his wrath that

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

he could not refrain from banging one boot upon the parquet viciously, at which Jehan smiled grimly behind the covers of his book and gently closed it.

"*En fin!*" Jehan breathed, and, blowing out his candle, rose and noiselessly left his room. On the third story a narrow passage led to an unused room where trunks were stored and lavender dried for the linen closets. Its window opened on the area opposite their neighbour's wall, leaving a space about eight feet wide between. The window was curtainless and dimly, under the eaves, could be seen a heterogeneous quantity of old trunks, furniture and odds and ends. The air was impregnated with the scent of lavender, which lay in purple, crisp bunches on a large table, drying.

Reizet groped about till he found a chair with three whole legs and propped it against the wall near the window, which was in deep shadow, while the wall opposite was palely visible. It was nearly eleven, and time for persons who were dining out to be returning home. He had small doubt as to who would soon appear opposite, and awaited her coming with mingled wrath and amusement.

What skilled duplicity had she been capable of during these past weeks, and how excellent had been her training of an unsophisticated boy, for of course she had been amusing herself with Jack, simply to keep her hand in, no doubt. He had heard that if an American girl could find nothing better to flirt with, she would flirt with a bedpost, and doubtless Jack was a better alternative. The jade!

Suddenly Jehan saw her, framed in the window opposite. The darkness behind obscured the outline of her head, but the pure pallor of her face shone like a pearl. She was in evening dress, and something like a wreath of silver leaves gleamed in her hair. A dark fur boa lay about her shoulders, as she leaned far out, her laughing face lit by mischief. Her

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

usual somewhat airy dignity had vanished, leaving only a child revelling in her naughtiness.

"Ha-hum!" said she.

"Ha-hum!" answered Reizet, feeling absurdly excited.

"Show yourself," whispered Sylvia, "so I'll know you're real. Was so afraid that priggish brother of yours would keep you from coming. I've left mother losing her good money at the Princess's. She thinks I'm eating salad with the Duke, who said he'd expected your brother there to-night. Wish we could drown him, and then we'd——"

"Why drown me?" asked Reizet, leaning forward.

Sylvia uttered a faint cry and recoiled.

"Yes, mademoiselle, it's me," said Jehan ungrammatically. "It's the priggish brother you long to drown. I don't apologise or either living, or being here, as it's my own house."

She leaned nonchalantly against the coping of the window.

"But you do inconvenience me," she said with a sigh, "so why do you remain? For the—er—view?"

Reizet nearly lost his balance in a profound bow. "The—view—is charming, but I admit that I am here for a reason. Ack——"

"Jack isn't a reason. He's just a delightful boy, and you're interfering most unkindly in his affair. Do you think that's nice of you?"

Reizet frowned at this flippancy, but as it was dark the offender remained unimpressed.

"It is his affair of which I speak. Do you think it right or kind to cause a boy of fifteen to lose his sleep because of an affair?"

Sylvia shrugged her shoulders. "It depends on the nature of the affair, monsieur." She leaned both elbows on the window ledge and deliberately looked across the gulf with appealing candour. "Tell me, what fault have you to find with this affair? Isn't it—er—pleasing?"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Mademoiselle, you mock: you treat it lightly."

"You surely don't want me to commit suicide down in that horrid, dirty area?"

"This is a serious matter. Your mother——"

"Don't mention her. You little know how serious it is. You see, she somehow got wind of our innocent rendezvous, went out on the roof last night, and heard mysterious whispers. She thinks it is her maid, and sent me up here to catch the naughty creature. I have. Isn't she shocking? Now suppose your aunts or Jack do the same, and find you here. How will you explain it?"

"I'll tell the truth."

"How ungallant. And besides, how would you explain why you didn't go away at once? Really, I can't understand how you can do such an unconventional thing as to remain talking to—— Well, I'm surprised and disappointed, and must set you a good example. I'm off. Good night, Monsieur de Reizet. I won't tell Jack what you have done."

"Mademoiselle—a moment."

Sylvia stood, looking back at him over her shoulder.

"Shhh! Not so loud, please. Mother might appear on the roof again. Hurry."

"If you don't come nearer, I'll have to shout," said Reizet hoarsely. "You said your mother was angry. I trust she won't make you suffer."

"Not much, because she'll never know. I've bribed the maid to take the scolding and two of my best blouses. But please, monsieur—I'm not joking now"—her voice was sweet with tender pleading—"don't scold Jack. It has been all my fault. We've been so happy being friends, and truly I haven't done him any harm. He's such a dear."

Reizet felt a sudden hatred of the innocent Jack. "But such deception——"

Sylvia's eyes opened wide. "Oh, how unkind. We haven't

A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE

deceived any one. We just haven't run about telling. That's all. Are you going to tell about your part in it?"

"Well—ahem! Consideration for others would prevent——"

"That's just what prevented our telling," interrupted Sylvia with a sagacious nod. "Consideration for you and mother. But really, I must go. I at least must remember the conventions. Good night."

"Wait—just a moment. I shall be anxious to learn how your mother accepts the explanations. And don't you want to hear about Jack? As we don't meet often where we can talk, if you would come here to-morrow evening for a moment."

Sylvia drew herself erect. "Certainly not."

"In case you change your mind, I'll be here. You see, my aunts think it's our Philippe, and I suppose I'll have to bribe him with part of my wardrobe to take the scolding, as you have done. You see how far-reaching is the result of wrong doing. It will cost me at least two waistcoats. So, in case you want to hear——"

"Good night, monsieur."

"Good night, mademoiselle."

The next evening, Monsieur de Reizet, guardian of domestic proprieties, was promptly at the window over the area. After he had waited in chilly discomfort for nearly an hour, a wad of paper hurtled across the chasm and fell at his feet. Vainly he strained a longing glance. There was no sign of living creature. Having regained his room he turned the unsealed missive to and fro, addressed to Jack, assuring himself that, as elder brother, it was his bounden duty to read it. Thus ran the note:

"Dearest:

"This is for you and for you only, but I know that in-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

quisitive brother of yours will read it, calling it duty, not curiosity. Some people are so intrusive. This is just to tell you that our domestic horizon is again calm, thanks to the maid and the beauty of my two blouses, now my maid's. I don't suppose you'll ever get this, as your brother won't want you to find out what he did. If you don't speak of it, I won't, and your brother shall keep his guilty secret. To look at him, one would never imagine him capable of such behaviour. Sad, isn't it? Fondly,

SYLVIA."

CHAPTER X: THE TANGO

RAIN glinted on a flotsam of umbrellas in the rue Caumartin and pattered on glistening roofs of automobiles as they insinuated themselves between each other in the narrow thoroughfare, their inmates revealed by brilliant lights in the shop windows. On the left flared a glittering sign in gas lettering: "Sans Souci Tea Rooms," and before this Mrs. Bradish's motor paused. Her footman sprang down to open the door and stood respectfully at attention as she, Sylvia and the Duke passed into the hall, carpeted with red and lined with plants below great mirrors. A man in uniform ushered them up some steps and through velvet curtains. Music met their ears, mingled with confusion of voices, moving feet and click of silver and porcelain. Within the small hall little tea-tables stood about near the silk-panelled walls on which, at either end, mirrors covered the space from floor to ceiling, reflecting and doubling the effect of the dancers. Divans ran around the room against the wall, and above, on the balcony, other tables were placed from which faces peered over the rail.

It was five o'clock, and every seat was occupied save the five reserved by Mrs. Bradish in a conspicuous position near the entrance. Spectators were massed at all places of vantage, and waiters in short black jackets ran to and fro, trays held high and white serviettes whisking space for their movements. Here there was no taint of Bohemian Montmartre. On the contrary, all that was ultra smart made itself evident both as to company and costume. Here and there mild-featured Americans were grouped, evidently expecting the worst, and disap-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

pointed at not finding it. A Russian Grand Duchess with slanting green eyes, haughty bearing and long limbs circled the floor in the embrace of a professional tango teacher with a Jewish profile. Of course the demi-monde were there, but of the most elegant type; richly and quietly dressed and demure of manner, as well as ladies of fashion also, perhaps less quietly dressed and less demure.

The air was heavy with scent from bouquets on tables, perfumed bodies and violets on breasts. The languorous monotonous rhythm of the tango throbbed above the babel and seemed to hypnotise dancers into dazed ecstasy, as they moved slowly about the floor, bending, swaying, rising and falling in measured tread. Women held close, raised faces with half-closed eyes to their partners' as, smileless and palpitant, they swam through the heated air. Feathers, furs, velvet, delicate, transparent bodices, lips vividly scarlet, the clink of jewelled ornaments and golden purses, and always that insistent, barbaric music which searched for and revealed primeval savagery among artificial trappings of civilisation.

The Duke ushered the two ladies around the outskirts of the dancers to their table, salutations were hastily exchanged as they passed other tables, and the little Vicomte rose to greet them, waving a proprietary hand toward the Princess, who sat stolidly, evidently bewildered by her unusual surroundings. A tiny black bonnet trimmed with glass gooseberries was tied beneath her fat chin; her hands were encased in two-button black gloves, and a flat collar of lace encircled her fat neck, fastened by a large cameo pin. Her face wreathed itself in smiles as the Vicomte cried, pointing at her, "Behold! I brought her. She shall see what Paris, the real Paris of to-day, is like."

"Bedlam! Bedlam!" replied the Princess, "but gay. I regret my age and my fat. To think that such things transpire while

THE TANGO

I sit behind my iron-barred windows in the Faubourg, sipping chamomile tea. But these tango dancers walk in their sleep, and should be decently put to bed. *Voilà tout*”

The Vicomte chuckled, twisting the pointed end of his dyed and waxed moustache. “Not asleep are they, *chère amie*. They look solemn that they may not betray their intoxication. Is it not so, mademoiselle?”

Sylvia had thrown off her coat and sat watching, while neighbouring eyes, jaded by dissipation, rested on her freshness with curiosity. Mrs. Bradish touched her sleeve. “Sylvia dear, the Vicomte speaks to you.”

Sylvia turned with a smiling apology, and the Duke repeated the question. “Intoxication?” she said. “It is clear that you have never tangoed, for with one’s brain occupied with eighty-five steps, it is like a geometrical proposition. Yet it’s charming, just the same, and exciting, for one’s feet feel as though one had walked into a grab-bag and didn’t know which step to take. Ask Monsieur de Petrinac.”

The Duke had deposited his silk hat on a peg above the table and sat appraising his surroundings, pleased that many he knew saw him with Mrs. Bradish and her daughter. Now that his mind was at rest and his programme decided upon, he desired above everything to have their names associated with his, that creditors might become aware of his prospects, and also that when finalities were reached between himself and Sylvia, that gossip would be another thread which would bind the girl to him, for, her name once linked with his, another French marriage would be difficult of accomplishment. During the past few weeks he had worked as he had never worked before, trotting at Mrs. Bradish’s Louis Quinze heels into American drawing-rooms; to teas where he seemed to be the only able-bodied male; and to such places as he now found himself in; hot, bored, inwardly irritated, hating the commonness of this modern method of amusement and the

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

banal pettiness of his surroundings and its society. He was fastidious in a conservative fashion, mediæval in his belief that he and his class were not as Mrs. Bradish and her class, and her honest unconsciousness of any such indifferences galled his pride and vanity. While bowing before her, he really inclined only before her money. The latter once his, through her daughter, he felt that his long suppressed annoyance and contempt would no longer be concealed. That Sylvia might bear the brunt of it he anticipated with an almost wolfish pleasure, though lately the girl had caused him to realise her femininity in an unexpected fashion. His cousin's prophecy that she could "raise the devil with a man" had lately recurred to him more than once, and he congratulated himself that, added to her dower, she might, after all, bring to his jaded senses fresh pleasures and excitements. But once his, he meant to retire with her behind proper barricades against these modern inanities. Stately elegance and ceremonious dignities should take their place—dull, perhaps, for her, but she must become of his order, mingle only with his class, and absorb their methods of life, ideas and codes, or it would result in unpleasantness for her. Of course his relatives would be civil, but that they would never take the girl into intimacy he was aware. Why should they? What had they in common with this young girl from a land where hay-rides were the most approved form of social intercourse and who, when questioned, seemed vague regarding the identity of her great-grandfather? Doubtless he had been a Red Indian and lived on roasted enemies. The Duke sometimes shuddered on the possibilities of racial heredity, and hoped that a kindly Providence might spare him a son of prehistoric attributes.

When Sylvia called upon him for an opinion regarding the tango, he longed to tell them all that he considered it vulgar, obnoxious, and only amusing when indecent; but he rose, smil-

THE TANGO

ing, and held out his hand to the girl, who came to him, nodding at the others over her shoulder.

"You shall see for yourselves," he said, as he placed his arm about her, "how perfect a thing Mademoiselle has made it. I am her humble pupil."

The floor was crowded and Sylvia and he were obliged to stand motionless a moment, his arm still about her, and the girl became conscious that he was not listening to catch the step. She glanced in the mirror behind them, and saw that his eyes were fixed on a tall, dark-browed woman opposite, with an abnormally white face and crimson mouth, who was seated opposite beside a man, elbow on table, chin in palm. Her costume was the last word in quiet elegance, and her wrist, from which the long white glove fell, was loaded with delicate bangles, inset with jewels. The man beside her spoke in her ear, his face close to hers, but her weary eyes were on the Duke, brooding, retrospective, as though they studied not him, but rather saw him hazily, through memories. Apparently unconscious of surroundings or indifferent to them, she watched him, an expression of profound weariness on her beautiful face. Sylvia glanced at the Duke. His face was hard and his eyes held apprehension. Then Sylvia saw the Princess lean and whisper to the Vicomte, who smiled, shrugging his shoulders.

It all took but an instant, and Sylvia and her partner moved into the dance, their feet rhythmically in accord, their bodies swaying and bending or pausing. But Sylvia at once felt a difference in the proximity of the man who held her to himself. The arm across her back was of steel; his fingers in their gloves held her left hand lightly, but like a vice, as though alert for defence against something which might divide them. And then, like a flame from a pit of unholy desire, passion sprang from him to her. The girl with difficulty refrained from recoiling. She longed to cry out: "Let me go! Unloose me!" but worldly training stood her in good stead, for

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

instinctively she knew no word of hers would make him drop his arm. So slowly they moved about the room, while women's eyes, beneath henna-tinted lashes, and men with flaccid faces watched them, appraising her sweet grace and youth. The Duke was well known, and soon Sylvia's identity was passed from lip to lip, and heads approached one another, and significant smiles wreathed faces where admiration or envy betrayed their suppositions. As they passed the woman she rose, drawing up her sable coat, which her companion laid about her shoulders. When Sylvia looked again they were gone. She heard the Duke give a quick sigh and suddenly he bent his lips to her ear.

"Je t'aime!" he breathed. The words, as light as a caress, vibrant with egotism, sounded in her ear like the click of a clock which shut them together within some fastness from which she must at all costs free herself. She was quick-witted, and knew that to treat the words seriously was to give them meaning, so she glanced up at him archly, while her soul sickened. "You mustn't give me sweets before my tea; they come after buttered toast. Which reminds me—I'm hungry. Let us stop."

The Duke relinquished her and moved ahead, making way between tables and dancers. As they passed the entrance, some one blocked the way. She glanced up and found Reizet standing before her, plainly intent on obstructing her passage. He frowned down on her astonished face in anything but an amiable fashion, took her unceremoniously by the elbow, and an instant later she found herself in the outer circle among palms and empty tables. She drew a long breath. "You!" she exclaimed.

Reizet was looking about. "Waiter! Waiter!" he called. "Here! Take that off this table," pointing to a card marked "Reserved," "and bring tea and anything you have for two."

"But Monsieur——"

THE TANGO

Reizet picked up the card and slipped it into the waiter's hand with a coin.

"Come, hurry. And now Mademoiselle, be pleased to seat yourself, here, in this wicker chair where the light is out of your eyes. No! don't protest. You're not going back to your lawful guardians, who ought to be ashamed of themselves——"

"My goodness, but you're cross," said Sylvia, meekly subsiding into the chair as bidden. "They'll worry. I must go and tell them." She half rose but Reizet barred her way.

"No! You're to remain where you are. I'm going to tell them you've met a—er—friend, and will be back in a little while——"

He was gone, and Sylvia wondered why she submitted, and why such as he had come to so frivolous a place. In a moment he returned, frowns banished, and seated himself opposite, his hat on the floor beside him. He seemed uncommonly tall and lean, and in their corner, behind the standees, they were as alone as though on a desert island.

"I carried things with a high hand," he laughed. "Just threw explanations at their dazed faces and fled. They never dream that I'm the 'friend,' as I'm so firmly fixed in their minds as an enemy, and least of all that we are tête-à-tête. But here is the tea. Pour it, and I will butter the toast, for we haven't much time. Paul may pounce upon us at any moment, and invariably takes three cups."

Sylvia pulled off her gloves and held the pink tea-pot poised, feeling as though that ominous click of a prison lock had been an ugly dream.

"You look more amiable," she said. "Why were you so cross?"

Reizet laughed. "I was cross as two sticks, and with reason. What are you doing in such a place, dancing the tango among this riff-raff?"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Riff-raff?" queried Sylvia with lifted brows. "Every one comes here. Look at them: people we know on every side——"

"There are those whose skirts should not brush yours. Abominable! Paul ought to know better. Are there any nice French girls here? Imagine my aunts here——"

"Couldn't, possibly," said Sylvia, suddenly feeling conscious of an inappropriateness in her surroundings. She felt, to her horror, a slow blush rise from her throat to her brow, and saw that her host noted it. He put down his cup, leaned both arms on the table, and said gravely:

"No man, Mademoiselle, likes to see a good woman in bad company. If he is any way a decent chap, he wishes to protect her from the mire of the world. Science has proved that the thoughts and desires which are about us, are quite as real and potential as the tables and chairs. In a place like this, what thoughts are eddying and vibrating from the minds of others to yours? Are they noble, beneficial, elevating; or sordid, soiling, and ignoble? You will feel exhausted when you leave here, and fancy it is only because of vitiated air. You could breathe precisely the same air, surrounded by innocent children, and feel little effect. That is a fact. You think perhaps that I am odd to speak so in such surroundings, but if we suited our thoughts and conversation always to environment, there would be little holiness out of church, whereas the world, not the church, needs it. Tell me, are you amused here? Do you find this sort of thing satisfactory and to your taste?"

Sylvia pushed a spoon to and fro on the cloth for a moment without speaking, then she looked up at him straightly from beneath level brows.

"Monsieur, you are good to speak honestly to me, as though I had intelligence and could appreciate ideals. No. I'm not happy here; not even interested. One feels a curious loneli-

THE TANGO

ness; memory creates contrasts——” Sylvia’s voice trailed to silence.

“What contrasts?” asked Reizet.

The girl dropped her chin into a curved palm. “Oh, childish things; far away from this sort of thing. Often, at smart parties, in crowded places like this, I close my eyes to shut it out, and see—but it would not amuse you.”

“Close your eyes now, and tell me what you see.”

Reizet waited, his gaze fixed on two petal-white lids and shadowy lashes resting on fresh cheeks, then her eyes opened and smiled into his.

“Well, I’ll tell you, if you’ll promise not to laugh. When I was a little girl, I lived in a small, white clapboard house on the edge of a town where the country was a neighbour. The house had green wooden shutters, and a small garden, with box-edged flagged paths, where hollyhocks grew higher than my head. In the Winter it was very cold and still. Snow fell sometimes for days at a time, and at night the whole world seemed palely luminous, like an enormous pearl which God had thrown into space. My father was a quiet man, not robust—thin and stooping, with kind eyes. He had a den—a small room with a worn carpet, a table in the centre covered with a green cloth, somewhat ink-spotted. The furniture was mahogany covered with horsehair and around three sides of the room were bookcases. There was a lamp with a green paper shade, and over the mantel was an engraving of George Washington crossing the Delaware. You, Monsieur, perhaps find that room ugly; but it was beautiful, for my father made it so. Every evening he would invite me to a party there, and those he introduced to me I found better company than I have ever known since. There would be a wood fire in the grate, and I would enter, my hair neat, dressed in a clean frock, to be presented to Plato, Mr. Emerson, Mr. Thoreau or Carlyle and the latter’s heroes. My father sat in one big chair on one

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

side of the fire, and I on the other, and he would read aloud or talk to me. He could change that little room into the palace of the Cæsars; the cool porticos of the Acropolis. He made me hear the dip of oars on Venetian canals and the song of nightingales in Persian gardens. My father, Monsieur, was a cashier in a bank, and had never been even to New York, but he used to stand before his bookcase and tap the glass front with his glasses and say: 'Daughter, here is a world where you meet only the best company, and learn from them that the real life is not without, but within, for you can carry your thoughts where you will.' It is true, for there I lived amid more beauty than I do here. Monsieur, I would give every bit of our Louis Quinze furniture, luxury, gaiety, for just one hour in that ugly, beautiful, big little room with my father."

Reizet did not trust himself to lift his eyes from his hands on the table, where he piled salt into a pyramid absently. A poignant note of moral solitude and wistful sadness had sounded above the click of high heels and babel of voices. A breath as from immeasurable distances seemed wafted to him through the vitiated atmosphere, and he felt an impulse to cover that small hand near his with his own, and to say: "Leave the path you are treading and come with me, and I will keep step with you as we climb together above the murk of the world." He tossed the salt into his tea cup. "Your father was right, Mademoiselle, and I feel that I have missed a great deal in not having been included in those parties of yours, in that big, little room. Tell me, do you like my countrymen?"

Sylvia threw herself back in her chair with a gesture of negation.

"Oh, come. You can't expect me to answer that question. Why should I? If I said yes, you would doubt. If no, you would ask me why."

THE TANGO

am answered," laughed Reizet. "Now tell me why you like them."

ut you shall not make me say rude things."

'e'll call it a mere statement of fact. What is the matter us?"

ou're not included, remember, in my criticism, because /ork. But the others—they get on my nerves. They are cited about little nothings. They don't love their coun—

y dear Mademoiselle!" protested Reizet.

o, they do not. Not your class. They love their own , their traditions, prejudices and codes, but not France.

Monsieur, what are they doing for her? Nothing. They like naughty children behind closed doors over in the Fau-St. Germain, waiting for the Republic to get out of their

They would serve a King, but not their country, and, to ind, that isn't patriotism."

zet winced. "But their country will have none of them. don't trust a man with royalistic traditions who bears a associated with those who formerly oppressed the people. annoy them."

via smiled. "They needn't. I don't know of three such ; prefixed by a title which is associated with anything im-it, do you? What man of the noblesse has benefited the sciences or political and industrial aggrandisement of e during the past thirty years?"

zet paused, and Sylvia saw an expression of profound g shadow his face. "Mademoiselle," he said slowly, "a is proved by events, and our class awaits them. There ain emperor in Berlin who, while endeavouring to prove vn greatness, may, before long, give us an opportunity ve ours, to his own undoing."

ar . . ." breathed Sylvia.

s. Perhaps through that unreasoning and monstrous

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

means we will prove to such sceptics as yourself that at least we have not forgotten how to—die becomingly.”

“That sounds positively dramatic.”

“Life is dramatic,” Reizet replied smiling. “But I assure you that the nobles of France have not forgotten ideals or how to be noble. I feel sometimes as though Fate stood quite close, veiled, holding, like a sacred chalice, a great gift for us—the chance to prove ourselves. We are just—waiting.”

Sylvia smiled. “Your cousin appears to find ‘waiting,’ as you call it, fairly agreeable. I can’t exactly see him reviving heroism.”

“Don’t scoff. Before long, you may see men who now excel only in tango steps and waistcoats, springing to a moral splendour which will amaze the world.”

Sylvia sighed. “Fate will have to supply a mightily effective springboard, then. Why, to me, some of them seem hardly human—just effigies. One can’t imagine them being human enough to—die, for they don’t appear to—live.”

“Paul should hear you——”

“He has.”

“Mon Dieu! And what did he say?”

“Oh, he said that owing to a malign influence modern ideas gain ground, and that he hoped he would be able to show me why the old order was the best.”

“Has he?”

“Not much. I told him that, happily, modern ideas did gain ground, else we’d still be wearing skins like cave-dwellers and be without wireless telegraphy. Oh, he knows I’m right, and it ruffles him when I say that whereas his ancestors dallied on the terraces of St. Cloud, while the people starved to pay for their pleasant sins, that to-day, Life rings a sterner note, an echo of the revengeful cry of the Revolution. To-day, there isn’t time for ironing ruffles for the Deputies, for the people want cake as well as bread, and have it. Oh, Monsieur,

THE TANGO

you should have seen his face when I pointed out the *canaille* eating ham sandwiches on the lawns of Versailles, and said how nice I thought it was."

Reizet threw back his head and laughed. "Poor Paul. No wonder he has looked worn lately."

Sylvia sighed. "Yes, I suppose I am wearing, but——"

Sylvia paused, looking over Reizet's shoulder apprehensively. She rose quickly. "Here comes mother!" she whispered. "Give me my boa. Good-bye. Thanks for the tea."

Reizet felt a butterfly touch from her hand, caught a fleeting smile, and she was gone—lost in the throng beyond them. He retired to the top of the stair and from that vantage ground saw his cousin escort the party to their motor, and noted the significant smile of the Princess, who winked frankly at the Vicomte, as the Duke put the footman aside and himself assiduously covered Sylvia's knees with the rug and then climbed in himself.

A moment later Reizet strode forth. It was still raining, but he pulled his coat collar up about his throat and his hat down over his eyes and set out, for he felt the necessity of air and darkness to clarify his thoughts.

The rue de la Paix was thronged, and he turned to the left, intent on reaching the Tuileries Gardens. There, beneath dripping branches, he found the solitude he craved, for no other human creature braved its sodden desolation. The long alleys, usually gay with children's voices, and be-ribboned nurses, stretched on either hand, dim, forsaken and blotched with pools of water. Here and there among tree-trunks, miniature lakes spread, reflecting gas lights from iron pillars with untroubled distinctness.

He found his way along the terraced walk which runs beside the rue de Rivoli, to the high esplanade overlooking the Place de la Concorde. Early twilight had deepened to dusk, and the vast square, agleam with myriad lights, glittered with

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

moving reflections on its wet pavements, from hurrying vehicles which swarmed in every direction. He leaned on the stone balustrade, feeling, despite the chilling dampness, a curious glow of exhilaration, as though youth, which had lain dormant under care and responsibilities, stirred to life. He had the curious sense that his heart and brain were working independently of one another and at variance, and with defiant recklessness he desired to ignore thought, that feeling might have full sway, knowing that it was but a momentary luxury to be controlled and relegated to stern common sense later.

He looked about him. No living soul was in sight along the way he had come, but near him, his face turned the other way, watching the rue de Rivoli's gayer thoroughfare, another figure, in a shabby coat and cap, also leaned on the balustrade. Grey hair peeped from under the cap, and his tall, thin figure was bent, as though with age weariness. Reizet gave him a passing thought of compassion, and promptly forgot his existence, turning his own glance again to the square and his thoughts within, where a new and radiant vista had opened.

For the first time in his life, he had come in contact with a young girl who was, at the same time, intelligent, innocent, without being ignorant; light-hearted, yet comprehending the profound sadness of human existence: whose mind could venerate what was fine and high and also weigh with a just sense of proportion the slight intrinsic value of material prosperity, when not linked with moral content. The young French girls he had known in that superficial fashion permitted by his class, banality or cleverly concealed knowledge of evil, combined with reserve to render any true intimacy of thought impossible. For the companionship of women, therefore, he had been driven to the society of married women of that half-world against which his fastidiousness revolted. Free interchange of sympathetic thoughts, free from coquetry, had been impossible with either, and this had resulted in a certain atti-

THE TANGO

tude of aloofness, antagonistic to both his nature and desires.

But during the last hour he had come close to a nature singularly free from self-consciousness. Sylvia had seemed to him to share with his younger brother a certain frank boyishness, tempered with capacity for tenderness which was at once captivating and appealing. Her frankness regarding her modest origin he found worthy of the highest breeding. No pretence there: no striving for effect. It had been merely the outspoken expression of a clean soul which rebelled against sophistries. And the sweetness of her confidence in his power to understand had been the subtlest flattery, and Reizet was too masculine in his make-up not to feel it and be drawn to the giver of such faith.

And Paul was to garner that young creature to himself: slowly dwarf her budding womanhood, train her free nature to stiff decorum, and mould her into an absurd likeness to those artificial women by whom she would be surrounded. . . . "Damn!"

The vigorous English expletive was made aloud and shocked Reizet into clearer decision. In an instant an audacious resolve formulated. What prevented his making a try for the maid himself—if the deal with the Government went through successfully?

Why not give rein to that upspringing joy and warmth which the last hour had brought to fruition? Each time that he had come in contact with Sylvia interest had augmented. Curiosity had given it birth, whetted by disapprobation and antagonism, but what charm the girl must have to overcome both and thus enlist his desire to protect and conciliate! She had said that thoughts carried one where one would go, regardless of material obstacles, and swiftly his own thoughts sped to a future which she shared; and delightful and alluring visions rose like a mirage on the horizon of his soul, reversing the old order of existence which had been filled with duties

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

devoid of joy. In their place wider horizons opened, wherein power and accomplished ambitions went hand-in-hand with love. Had Paul the prerogative of both? If certain schemes now in abeyance came to successful issues, he, Jehan, was equal in the race, and the goal was worthy of his best efforts. Wealth, gained through his own exertions, once his, what delight to succour this young girl from a loveless marriage and surround her with an atmosphere where every delicate sensibility of her fine soul could flower into beauty. He thought of her in his home, amid that gentle environment, lighting its shadowed quietude with her gay youth. Jack would then have no need of stolen meetings, and the aunts would have a new outlet for their tenderness. He would be independent of her wealth, and give, rather than receive—always a finer pleasure. He saw her seated opposite him at table in the old dining-room, her laughing face lit by countless candles—many candles, hundreds, thousands—they sprang to light from every side, broke into sparkling particles, sank to darkness, deeper, an abyss without bottom—darker than night—

* * * * *

Paris wakes at dawn slowly, wearily, and presents a haggard face to the pale light which emerges from the East with laggard fatigue. She is a city for sunshine and artificial light, and the solemnity which dignifies other great cities under darkness, in Paris begets a tragic incongruity. The human element which fills her streets is absent, and in its place a silence broods wherein a stray footstep sounds with sinister significance. Under the arcade of the rue de Rivoli, a few hours before like a stream running swiftly beneath the architraves of a bridge, the pavements were deserted. The motor busses had not commenced their day's work and the street was empty, save for a cleaning machine, whose great broom swept rolling ribs of mud toward the gutters. The driver, perched high on his diminutive seat, hand on lever, shivered under his rubber cape,

THE TANGO

or a keen wind was rising, and though the rain had ceased, the clouds hung low about the Eiffel Tower across the river and rippled the pools which had spread to greater dimensions in the Place de la Concorde since the evening before.

The rasping sound of the broom on the wooden pavement was suddenly silenced at the corner of the Tuileries where the high terrace abuts on the Place de la Concorde, and the driver's glance travelled indifferently along the parapet between the vases through which he could discern the gravelled race. He pulled the lever and carefully turned his machine for its return journey, when suddenly he rose in his seat and peered intently between the openings in the balustrade, for a figure sat huddled on a bench not twenty feet away, on a level with his own head. Its curious immobility, and the fact that the law allowed no one within the gardens after ten o'clock at night and before seven in the morning, roused his suspicions. He brought his machine to a standstill and examined the figure. It sat, bent backward, with a pale face raised, eyes closed and arms spread awkwardly, palms upward. It was soaked with rain and grey with a lividness which awoke fear in the observer. He called: "Ohé! Ohé!" sharply, but the figure gave no sign of life.

Happily at that moment a stout little gendarme appeared from the rue Cambon, a block away, and the driver shouted, his voice sounding abnormally loud in the silence. The gendarme approached leisurely, and from the other side of the street demanded irritably the cause of this disturbance. The driver pointed with a hairy hand, and in a trice the gendarme was on the curb, vainly endeavouring to see the odd object on the bench above him.

The driver sprang down and hospitably offered the gendarme the vantage ground of his seat, and the guardian of the law mounted, his face grave, then important, as he examined the still figure.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"A drunken fool, who doubtless had need of the bath he has enjoyed," he said. "We'll run him in and make him give an account of himself. Leave your infernal monstrosity and come with me, for one pair of arms are not sufficient for a waterlogged derelict."

The twain ran to the nearest gate, and with his key the gendarme opened it. They sped back along the terrace and reached the bench. But here the gendarme's manner underwent a change. No derelict was this of the gutter, homeless and ragged, but a seigneur of well-cut garments, white hands, on one finger of which was a signet ring. The gendarme, with the skill of experience, at once put his nose to the man's mouth and sniffed, but no odour of liquor was detected. He then, with a dirty thumb and finger, lifted the eyelid and glimpsed a glazed eye, expressionless, the ball devoid of consciousness. He made an inarticulate sound in his throat and turned brusquely to the driver.

"Fly! Make thy wooden sabots into wings and fetch me a cab. This man lives, but not for long unless he get warmth and succour. Stay! There is a café a block away on the rue St. Honoré. Take this franc and bring cognac with you. Now! Off with you."

The gendarme, as soon as alone, proceeded to examine the unconscious man's pockets, and found them apparently untouched. His watch had stopped at one-forty and some loose change and a wallet in his breast pocket in which were two hundred-franc notes were intact. Evidently robbery had not been a factor in the affair, and the little gendarme scratched his head, puzzled, for neither had drunkenness brought about the situation. Yet how had a gentleman of distinction come to spend the night on a bench in the Tuileries Gardens, soaked with rain? Had he fainted or had a stroke? He was breathing slowly and heavily, and already a faint colour was returning to the grey face.

THE TANGO

The gendarme carefully went through the wallet searching something by which to identify, and at last found a card, "de Petrinac," and below in pencil was scrawled, "Venez chercher chez Sans Souci six heures. Important."

With the gendarme, like all well-informed Parisians, was far with so brilliant a light in the social firmament as the sun, and also with his great house on the Faubourg St. Germain. He had never seen the gentleman, but the latter must have been surprised had he known how conversant this man of the law was with his tastes and habits, for the daily journals of fashion had been faithful in recording his goings and comings; his presence at famous châteaux and first night parties.

The gendarme was charmed by the importance of this affair, anticipated with a thrill of joy the excitement which would come about Paris, when the tale was told in the papers. His name would be linked conspicuously with that of the noble duke as his saviour, protector and friend. He saw a medal pinned to his blue coat and a fine fat wad of bills in the pocket of his trousers. Fifine should have a new hat and together they would make such a night of festivity as Montmartre had seldom witnessed.

Meanwhile he supported the supposed ducal head against the wall where burned high hopes, swearing under his breath at the dishonesty of his messenger, with whom he feared he might be obliged to share glories and cash. At last the latter appeared, perched beside the cocher of a disreputable fiacre and halted below the parapet. As the horse apparently had no other desire to move, the three men carried Reizet below, deposited him within, where cognac was forced between his jaws and consciousness partially returned.

A few moments later the gendarme battered at the ducal door and roused the concierge, who, thrusting forth his bullet in its tasselled night cap, demanded the meaning of so

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

unseemly a commotion. A torrent of explanations was hurled at him, nothing of which he understood save that vipers would gnaw the entrails of his grandmother unless entrance was speedily given to the Representative of the Law.

Consideration for his aged relative brought the concierge forth, and the great gates swung open to the limp burden, which, when recognised by the concierge, awoke him to the seriousness of the situation.

Reizet was carried into the library on the ground floor and the Duke summoned. He came, swathed in a bed-gown of brocade, feet in heelless slippers, his face gaunt in the morning light. When he beheld Reizet he turned pale and listened to the tale as unfolded simultaneously by the street-cleaner, cocher and gendarme with a horror and sympathy plainly sincere.

Reizet was carried bodily upstairs to a guest room overlooking the inner court. Its chill was speedily dissipated by a roaring fire, while blankets were heated and warming pans requisitioned, and the Duke with his own hands assisted Reizet from his rain-sodden clothing and into bed. Vigorous measures soon restored Jehan's consciousness, and as soon as ordered speech was accomplished, he went through the pockets of his clothing. The Duke watched the contents spread on the counterpane, relieved to learn that all were intact, and with his own hands placed them beneath Jehan's pillow.

When the servants had departed, the Duke counselled sleep, but Jehan was eager to both tell his own story and learn of subsequent events, so the Duke drew a chair to the bedside, nothing loth, and facts were interchanged. The apparent absence of motive puzzled both men, and the explanation was finally accepted as having been a sudden syncope engendered by chill after the heated dancing room. There was one point, however, which remained unexplained. Reizet had lost con-

THE TANGO

sciousness while leaning on the balustrade, but had been found several yards away from it, seated on a bench. How came he there? Who carried him there, and having done so, why was he left unprotected, when a call to pedestrians below would have brought help? Reizet recalled the aged derelict he had noticed, and decided that the man had supposed him to be intoxicated, and, trusting to air and rain to revive him, had departed, with the indifference engendered by personal misery.

Jehan's next thought was for his aunts and Jack, who doubtless had passed a night of anxiety. As no serious results had accrued, he decided to leave them in ignorance, and, with the Duke's assistance, concocted a note from the Duke, deploring that his servants had forgotten to deliver the note, and apologising for the worry this carelessness had caused them.

When these two ingenious fabrications were despatched, the Duke left Reizet alone for much needed sleep. It was a curious fact that neither of the men had suggested sending for a doctor, and each wondered whether the other had noticed it.

The Duke, on returning to the library, sent for all the servants and the three rescuers, and charged them all to preserve a discreet silence regarding the matter, on the ground of the two aunts, who would fear further syncopes. When one and all had sworn to silence and departed, the Duke retained the little gendarme, who stood abashed in the august presence, twirling his cap and endeavouring to summon republican faith in his equality with all men. The Duke seemed to detect the effort and to encourage it, so suave and cordial was his manner. Adroit questions were asked with such simplicity that the gendarme told all he knew and a little more, all of which, however, left the Duke knowing no more than before as to the motive and identity of the aggressor, if there had been one. Those high hopes which had animated the narrow breast of the gendarme were, moreover, skilfully squelched. The Duke made it clear that no newspaper must catch even an inkling of the mat-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ter directly or indirectly. There was something so decisive and of such veiled menace in the Duke's charming voice that the gendarme was relieved to make his adieux, partially consoled by the lousis which the duke imparted with a fraternal handshake.

As the gendarme strutted across the cobbles of the court, the Duke stood between the long curtains watching him go, while one fine hand twirled his beard to a sharper point. Long after the gates had clanged and only a sparrow hopped in a pool, the Duke still stood there, with bent head and narrowed eyes watching, while the day lowered into deeper greyness than the dawn had prophesied.

Upstairs, Reizet slept profoundly, dreamlessly, as only healthy youth can sleep after exhaustion. The vast room was dim, and the drip, drip of the rain mingled with the crash of dying embers.

The door slowly opened, with infinite caution, and in the aperture appeared Margot's face, awed by apprehension and the sense of mystery surrounding that still figure on the bed. She stood motionless for a moment on the threshold, eyes wide with concern, alert, ready for flight, finger on lip, dimples in abeyance; then she crept toward the bed, and one hand, light as a feather, caressed the coverlid. Cousin Jehan was ill and alone, and must be cared for, so she tip-toed around the bed, seated herself on the daïs behind the curtain, and, chin in palms, ruminated. No one knew she was there or indeed that she knew aught of what had transpired, but such a flutter in that ordered house could not escape her eyes and ears, when a nursery door was open and a crib not too high to climb from. She lost herself in dreams, watching the rain make muddy rivulets down the leaded casements, till she suddenly became aware that another presence was in the room, and peered stealthily around the curtain, fearing detection and dismissal.

THE TANGO

The Duke stood just within the room, closing the door soundlessly behind him, his glance searching the room rapidly, head up, listening, as though in fear. Of what was he afraid? Margot shrank back in her corner, more than ever anxious to remain undiscovered, while the Duke crept across the room to the bed, over which he leaned, looking at Jehan. Then he put forth one hand and gently insinuated it beneath the pillow. Margot forgot her own fears in fear for Jehan. Impelled by feminine instinct to guard what was ill and helpless, she suddenly lifted her face over the edge of the bed and confronted the Duke. He stared at her. Margot grew cold with fear, for she had seen that look on his face for others, but never before for herself. Then suddenly his face changed, and he smiled, an odd, twisted smile. But it was enough for Margot. She deftly slipped round the bed and, tucking her hand in the Duke's, pulled him toward the door, finger on lip. Once outside, she closed it, and with her back against it, confronted her parent with indignant eyes. "Knowest thou not that he sleeps and that good angels come during sleep to heal? Thou did'st almost wake him. But come. Lift me, that I may kiss, and forgive thee."

The Duke did not move for a moment, and again that odd, twisted smile smote across his face. Then he lifted her till her eyes looked into his own. "An angel was—near him," he said, "and the Evil One also," and then, without kissing her, he set her down.

They passed along the corridor together, and when they reached the nursery the Duke paused. For the third time that morning he repeated the necessity of silence regarding events, and Margot was also sworn to secrecy. So impressed was she that she quite forgot to say that Petan was at that moment in the house, on her way to early Mass at St. Philippe de Roule. Besides, Margot had no means of knowing Petan's power for scenting mysteries and running them to earth. At that moment,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

the housekeeper, under Petan's skilful handling, was betraying, bit by bit, every detail of the night's adventures. That Petan was sworn to secrecy was of small moment. She had no intention or desire to complicate the situation when no profit was to be gained thereby, but every inconsistency and detail was docketed in her cerebrum without comment, for the lives of those about her made up the sum of her own experiences.

CHAPTER XI: MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

ONE December afternoon about three o'clock, Petan and Sylvia were on their way to a shop near the Gare St. Lazare. It was raining, as usual, and within sight of their destination they were brought abruptly to a halt by a dripping gendarme, who explained that the streets were flooded under three feet of water, and the shop in question could be only reached by foot, on planks. The chauffeur's umbrella was in the motor, and armed with this the two descended and hurried on.

A surprising sight met their eyes. Where usually vehicles and human beings made a whirlpool of complexities in the square before the station, there now lay a great, quiet lake, from which emerged lamp posts, the top of the iron fence and letter boxes. The station steps held no hurrying crowd, and within engines stood useless, while an army of officials watched their invincible enemy creep higher and higher over submerged tracks, and telephones became dumb and electric lights fizzled to darkness.

Sylvia and Petan joined that silent throng which edged the lake, while rain fell monotonously, and faces paled with unspoken apprehension. In the distance the roar of Paris could be heard like a fading echo of former arrogance, and all the while the flood crept into neighbouring streets, filtering through barricades into cellars and vestibules. The two women, strangely depressed, pushed their way through the crowd to a side street. Pausing on the curb for an oppor-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

tunity to cross, Madame Petan gave a stifled cry. There, not ten feet away, was the hero of her adventure, the employee of the "1,000 chemises" emporium. He was holding his umbrella over the Duke de Petrinac, who, with creased trousers rolled high over mud-splashed spats, picked his way fastidiously through puddles.

At that instant Reizet (for it was he) espied Sylvia, and to Petan's amazement raised his hat in salute, to which Sylvia responded. Petan nearly collapsed then and there.

Who was he, thought Petan, her heart going pit-a-pat? Would he recognise and betray her? Had he forgotten that night of adventure and their delightful tête-à-tête at three A. M.? Her nimble imagination was already at work on a lie of subtle audacity when the Duke saw them, and blithely skipping the swollen gutter, dragged Reizet to their side. Petan caught a stare of astonished recognition from Reizet; trembled, and returned it with a stony glare of denial; then, as her hero's grey eyes melted to mischievous amusement, her nerves received another shock as Sylvia urbanely greeted both men and introduced "Monsieur de Reizet."

Petan's head whirled. What a situation! So her hero and Sylvia's were one and the same! It had been he who had indited those burning epistles, and he whose ardent suit she had encouraged. Yet little did he dream that she, the discreet one, who had assisted furniture through the windows of a house which did not burn, had also assisted the heroine of that garden tryst to further stolen joys. Little did he know that she, Petan, shared the secret of his passion; that her ear had been ravished by those ardent letters as had her eye by a dim vision of exquisite sentiment near a fence. What dramatic complexities! Her soul thrilled at the realisation of the web in whose centre she was enmeshed.

The Duke stepped ahead with Sylvia and Reizet's umbrella, while the latter fell behind with Petan.

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

There was a moment's silence, while Jehan took Petan's umbrella and held it generously above her. "We meet again," he remarked suavely.

"Fate is inscrutable," she replied.

"It is indeed!" sighed Reizet, his eyes fixed on the couple ahead.

Petan noted his glance and sighed in sympathy. She nodded sagely. "I too find it a pity," she said.

Reizet turned to her. "You know about it?" he asked.

"ALL," replied she. "Monsieur may have confidence in me, for Mademoiselle has intrusted me with her tender secret—the precious expressions of her—love."

Petan rolled her black orbs heavenward, and Reizet's thoughts flew to the Duke, for of course it must be he of whom the woman spoke. Her words were a shock. And so the American girl was abetting her mother in the humbuggery: this farce, where no true sentiment held a place save greed of money and worldly advantages. Out upon her! He glanced at the twain ahead. Sylvia with demure lids downcast and the fresh rose of her cheeks shadowed by tendrils of hair, was listening to apparent agreeable sentiments from the Duke, who, too absorbed to think of such mundane matters as an umbrella, was sheltering his own silk hat, and allowing rain to drip from its points on the girl beside him. They seemed absorbed in one another and oblivious of surroundings. How could Reizet know that Sylvia's ears were strained to catch what he said to Petan, or that her replies were vague, and her step slow, that the distance between them might be curtailed. Reizet, contemptuous of this "love" which Petan voiced, felt angry protest rise within him.

"And so, Mademoiselle—loves," he queried.

Petan smiled happily. "Does it not radiate from Mademoiselle," she demanded. "I am her loyal friend in the affair, for, knowing the rigid excellence of Monsieur's life and fam-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ily connection, I could wish nothing better for her. She relies on me. So wholly does she confide in my discretion that she has even honoured me with extracts from certain letters—which do honour to the sentiments which inspired them."

"Ye gods," thought her listener. "So there is a correspondence as well as hours of intimacy. Paul loses no time. Also, he doubtless finds lying easier on paper than by speech."

Just then the quartette came to a halt at a corner. Reizet stepped forward, and the Duke, jostled by the crowd, found himself by Petan, who, anxious to allow the two lovers mutual bliss, grasped both the Duke and the opportunity. In a trice the two couples were separated and Petan cried, with a firm hold on the Duke:—"Hasten. They went to the right," and dragged the distracted Duke precipitately along. Meanwhile Reizet, with a guiding hand on Sylvia, had fled in the opposite direction, ostensibly in search of the vanished Petan. They paused breathless at the corner and looked about for the other twain, but no sign of them could be discovered. Reizet longed to give three cheers, but managed a sympathetic expression when Sylvia wailed:—"She has my list, and——"

"It can wait, that shopping," said Reizet, who quickly evolved a plan of Machiavellian audacity. "Mademoiselle, cabs, as you see, are scarce, and as you know are slow and filled with microbes. Yonder is the Metropolitan. Allow me to take you home in that, for there is a station near your house, and in thirty minutes you will be there." Sylvia had no time to demur before she found herself descending into the bowels of the earth, and in a few moments they were squeezed, side-by-side, on a small seat of the electric train. Opposite them a stout gentleman was hidden behind a *Figaro*, and beside him dozed a tired workman in a blue blouse.

"Do you mind?" asked Reizet.

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

"I like it," Sylvia replied. "It is the first time I was ever here. Mother thinks it too democratic. These, I suppose, are the real French people. How in earnest they look!"

"They are. They work, Mademoiselle, and therein lies their dignity. They represent the moral stamina of France: its soul."

Sylvia raised surprised eyes. "And yet I have heard that Paris had no soul."

"Not from a Frenchman did you hear that. Foreigners judge France from the Folie B erg re and the shop windows. What do they know of France? Have they been in touch with the great heart which beats in this class; earnest, ambitious, self-controlled and abstemious? Have they known those great men living in unfashionable quarters of Paris, hand-in-hand with the arts and sciences, unconscious of the glitter and tinsel of the Paris you know? Mademoiselle, here in this great city, which harbours much, I admit, which is evil, there are lives of as heroic simplicity and worth as those of the Puritans who planted civilisation on your austere shores. You have no chance to know them in the world you live in. The best French women do not devote their lives to bridge and vainglory."

Sylvia turned and smiled up at Reizet's earnest face. "You are rapping the knuckles of my country women, aren't you? You judge Americans by those you meet here, as we do the French."

"How else can I judge? Alas! circumstances—have prevented me from seeing them on their own ground. Like many Frenchmen, I have travelled little. We are not curious, as a race. France gives us all we desire. But those Americans who expatriate themselves, in what do they interest themselves here? They have left their country and their duties and obligations behind them; yet they take none up here. They have escaped the poor at home, yet they feel no obli-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

gation to share the burdens of the poor here. From a French point of view it seems incomprehensible how a wealthy, free class can deliberately leave its own country, relatives, ties and responsibilities, and migrate to a foreign land, simply to enjoy themselves. Fancy my aunts, Paul and our friends packing up and settling in New York. Have Americans no roots?"

Sylvia winced. She recalled Utica and the simple duties which had been a serious background there, holding their lives in a firm grip, interwoven with common interests. She still felt the pain of having been wrenched from her place there, to be transplanted to a foreign soil.

She looked up straightly, into his eyes. "Tell me," she said with a glint of mischief in her smile, "why you told Jack you wished I'd go back to America, and—stay there."

Reizet was taken unawares. "Oh! really, did I say—that?" he murmured, flushing.

"You certainly did. Why?"

"You're not going, are you?" asked Reizet with dismay.

"That isn't answering my question."

Reizet considered a moment. "Well, you are a square peg in a round hole over here—at least, in the society you at present cultivate."

"Then, as a friend, you wish me to take the next steamer?"

"Heaven forbid, though—I—do, rather than—— Why shouldn't I? Mademoiselle, you bother me; you are an aggravation; you upset all my theories. You appear to be one thing, and act another. You are a delight seen through—an iron fence. I haven't wanted to like you, yet I do. You represent all of which I disapprove—worldliness, extravagance, unrest: yet there is a look in your eyes sometimes——"

Reizet made a gesture of helpless despair and sighed. Across the aisle a lady in black entered and sat down—Mrs. Morely. She saw them, and also that they were too absorbed

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

in one another to notice anything less disturbing than a bomb, so she leaned back in her corner with tactful quiet, surprised and charmed by what she had discovered. THAT was a solution which would be excellent for many reasons.

Vincennes had been reached and Mrs. Morely got out, wondering why neither of the twain opposite appeared inclined to do likewise, as the train now would return to its former point—the Etoile. Reizet was also perfectly aware of this fact, and prayed that Sylvia's ignorance of the "subway" might allow her to travel on up and down the length of Paris for an indefinite period.

"You are frank," Sylvia was saying. "I'll be so too, Monsieur. I know quite well what you think of me and everything connected with me, and much of what you say is true, but some is untrue. You blame me in your thoughts, forgetting that we are all in the clutch of circumstance. You are right, however, in saying that I am an alien among these people. I am homesick for old friends, old ways, old simplicities. Mother wants to lift me far up out of reach of the sadness of the world, and it makes for me only a clearer vision of it all. The contrast is the more painful. I am envied, and I'd rather be loved."

"You are," said Reizet. "At least Jack adores you, and there are other members of his family who——"

Sylvia laughed, then sighed. "Yes. Your aunts. I know I could make them love me if Mother would give me the chance, but—that silly quarrel. But—I want you to know that it was never mine, and that I understand why you cling to your old home, and that I respect the reason. I can understand how one could have a real passion for a home like that, whose very walls are part of the life of those whose traditions one loves and respects. But Mother, you see, simply can't comprehend preferring a sentiment to a check. Sentiment, she says, never did anything for her, while checks——"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Reizet glimpsed "Concorde" through the window for the second time that afternoon, and smiled, and Sylvia fancied that smile was derision of the efficacy of checks, but Reizet's next words contradicted that impression.

"I have the greatest respect for—checks, also, Mademoiselle, especially at present, when they are so needed among the poor. You see, being a member of the Relief Committee, I see more of misery resulting from the flooding of Paris than you do, and never have I so regretted not being a millionaire. When one reads of starving millions in China one is sorry of course, but it is far away and unreal, but here—it is real and heart-rending. If the Seine once gets over the parapets, Paris will see such disaster as she little dreams of. Already the cellars of the Louvre are afloat, though it is kept from the papers, and the hotels along the *due de Rivoli* will to-morrow send away their clients, for the foundations are in danger. Outside Paris, along Puteaux and Asnières, there are hundreds of homeless beings, their means of livelihood destroyed, and already my friends and relatives are giving shelter to them."

"Where?" asked Sylvia.

"In their own houses, of course. 'Noblesse oblige,' you know. Class distinctions don't count when trouble comes. We are then obliged to use our strength for their weakness; our prerogatives for their betterment; our possessions for their use."

"You mean to say the bedraggled creatures are being housed in those palaces?" asked Sylvia.

"Naturally," replied Reizet, as a grinding sound of brakes tautly applied was heard, and the train came to a jolting standstill in the tunnel. Passengers sprang to their feet and women screamed. The conductor flung open the sliding doors as the electric lights sputtered out, and Sylvia felt Reizet's hand take hers in the darkness, as she found herself caught in a vortex of humanity, surging outward. A voice rang out the

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

information that the tracks ahead were flooded and the engineer had been signalled to return to the last station: that there was no danger, if order could be maintained.

The voice was drowned in cries, and Sylvia felt that solidified mass of human beings sway this way and that, too unified to disintegrate, and the air, stifling, acrid, beat upon her senses as did the weight on her body of those near her. Reizet put an arm around her, barely touching, but holding off prodding elbows and heaving bodies, while the train slowly backed in the darkness. A few moments later, Sylvia heard the doors sliding open and Reizet held her back in their corner as the crowd surged and fought for egress. The platform was only lit by one oil lamp held on the white, tiled wall, and Sylvia was thankful that she was not within that maddened throng which fought for the staircase as though the flood was at its heels. At last she and Reizet followed, and a moment later found themselves on the wet pavement, drinking in deep breaths of air with gratitude. Near by, the Hotel de Ville loomed against the sky, and the square showed here and there pools of the Seine's invasion. Along one side soldiers were busy raising tents, while groups of refugees huddled in dull misery among piles of household goods beneath the down-pour. The sight was a shock as well as a revelation to Sylvia, and when an official in rubber coat recognised Reizet and spoke, Sylvia listened eagerly. It seemed that the rue Bonaparte and the Quai below the Conciergerie were flooded, and that over a hundred families were homeless. Reizet turned to Sylvia.

"Mademoiselle, I am sorry, but they need me more than you do. Our holiday truancy is ended. I will put you in a taxicab and send you home with apologies."

"But can't I help?" the girl asked. "There are women and children——"

Reizet looked at her, hesitating. Her thick tweeds, stout

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

boots and simple hat would not melt in the rain, and a certain expression of hardy self-reliance, gleamed in her serious eyes mingled with a real anxiety. As he was about to speak, Sylvia turned to the official. "Come," she said. "Use me. I can take at least twenty persons to my own house. Give them to me."

Without waiting, Sylvia led the way toward the homeless ones, while the two men followed. Nothing further was said, and Reizet apparently accepted the situation. Among pots and pans, sewing machines, sacks of potatoes and clothing, they found their way to those most in need. It was decided that Sylvia should accompany the first batch of women and children for which Reizet was responsible to the Princess', Faubourg St. Germain, where shelter would be given, and Sylvia squeezed herself into a cab with three dazed and rain-soaked women and as many children, while Reizet followed with another.

They were obliged to retrace their way more than once, as placid lakes and canals obstructed their progress, but at last they paused before a splendid house whose forbidding façade spoke of reticent splendours within. The usual courtyard was traversed. A moment later the Princess appeared at the top of the great staircase, a grey, knitted shawl about her shoulders, and felt slippers on her feet. With a gesture of large sympathy she threw wide her arms as she looked down on those below, "Mon Dieu! You poor beings. But we shall resuscitate the drowned ones. Pilette. Ring for the servants. Order fires in all the rooms of the two upper floors, and hot tisane:—four litres of hot tisane; bread, soup and mulled wine. Hasten, for they drip rivers."

She fluttered down the stair, kissed Sylvia's cheek, took the dirty baby into her own arms, and with her disengaged hand removed the wet head-gear of the women with words of commiseration. The latter took all this with no sign of surprise, and when, a few moments later, other servants led

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

them away, the Princess gave only a hasty adieu to Reizet and Sylvia. Reizet kissed her hand. "Madame," he said, "here are others——"

"And there is room for more. Send me a dozen more, though they have to sleep among wine and coal. Hasten. I have work to do. I'll trust no maids to wash those babies watched."

"And now for your 'batch,'" said Reizet to Sylvia, when they found themselves together in the cab en route for the fair. "That is, if you are sure Madame Bradish——"

Sylvia was not at all sure, but she knew that the basement of their house was empty, warm, tiled, and just the place for homeless beings, impoverished by no fault of their own, and, so, that even if her mother did object, she, Sylvia, would prefer to be scolded rather than to sleep that night in her c-hung bed, knowing that below were rooms which the poor might have enjoyed.

It was edifying to watch Reizet move among them, directing, consoling, encouraging. The gendarmes and soldiers obeyed his orders without question, and Sylvia also found herself arranging interiors of tents, bringing bread from a neighboring bakery and bottles of milk from the creamery. With a louis in her purse, she purchased from "La Samaritaine" near by clothing and bedding. One poor crone clung despairingly to a sewing machine, her sole means of livelihood, which, having been submerged in her cellar, where she stored men's coats, was now covered with mud and slime. No one listened to her pleadings, and Sylvia speedily bought it and rags and oil, and with her own hands assisted in cleaning it and had it carried to a café. Reizet, passing, saw her with sh back wet hair with her arm, hands blackened, and his own face was less grim because of the glow on hers. It was hard work, but exhilarating to feel her energies taxed by real labour. As she splashed through pools, arms laden, face wet,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

breathless, amid the confusion and haste, in the race against a flood's havoc, life seemed suddenly vital. To see the resulting good from the work of her hands was far more satisfactory than signing checks, and misfortune of others became real and near when touched and seen. At last, as twilight was pricked by lighted street lamps, and the racing surface of the river could only be heard, not seen, Reizet requisitioned four cabs, at Sylvia's request, and filled them with women, children and one old man, whose palsied head wagged a continual protest against misfortune. The procession then took up its way along the rue de Rivoli toward Sylvia's home. She was in the last cab; Reizet in the first, and he stood up, waving his hand to Sylvia, as they turned into the Place de la Concorde. She returned the salute, gaily, over the freight of human misery between them. Reizet had detected doubt beneath Sylvia's assurances of welcome from Mrs. Bradish, but cared more for results than her opinion. However, when they reached her portals, he deemed it tactful to make his adieux, to which Sylvia did not demur, and alone she conducted her charges into the main hall. Great was her relief to be told by the servant: "*Madame est sortie,*" and jubilantly did she greet Petan, who viewed the arrivals with consternation and sympathy. Petan instantly pointed out disagreeable possibilities, but Sylvia swept her fears aside and conducted her charges to the housekeeper's room, where she made a list of necessities to be purchased at once, while the servants brought food, took off wet clothing and scurried to and fro, eager to help.

The large, tiled and ventilated basement proved to be ample and excellent accommodation until other could be found elsewhere, and Sylvia felt her heart warm and lighten as she read relief and gratitude in her revivifying guests.

Suddenly Petan lifted a warning finger as the rumble of a limousine was heard entering the courtyard above. Sylvia

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

hesitated, fearing that her mother's possible displeasure might result in embarrassment for all concerned. She sped up the stairs and reached the hall as her mother entered, and stood transfixed in amazement, eyeing the sullied purity of the marble floor, covered with incongruous sacks, cooking utensils and prints of muddied feet and dripping clothing.

"My dear Sylvia!" she exclaimed, turning her lorgnettes on her daughter. "What is the meaning of this? Have gypsies mistaken my house for a village common?" She added a pile of odds and ends and brought forth, on the tip of her umbrella, a child's sabot, and held it aloft.

Sylvia looked from her mother's bewildered countenance at the object and laughed, though inwardly she quaked. "It means, mother dear, that I've brought home seventeen half-grown human beings from the ravages of the flood, and at the present moment they are down in the basement being hung out and hung up to dry."

"And who—where—?" began Mrs. Bradish, but Sylvia hurried above all things to prevent explanations at that stage of events. She ran to her mother and laid one finger on her lips. "No, mother. Not a word until you've seen them. I'm new how glad you'd be, and for once I wanted to get ahead of you in hospitality, though you'll probably think of no end of things to do and get which I've forgotten. Come."

The reader will see from the above how apt a pupil was Sylvia of the adroit Petan in her methods. Mrs. Bradish had time to protest. She was propelled toward the stairs, and down them, to the scene of action, where her astounded vision revealed cots being unfolded, blankets spread, and children fed, while their elders, in different conditions of dirt and disorder, were being waited upon assiduously by smart maids and armed men.

There was an ominous silence as Mrs. Bradish surveyed the scene from the threshold. "Well, my word!" said she.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Things seem to have happened in my absence." Then in French to the intruders: "I trust that you feel at home."

This sarcasm was lost upon these hungry and exhausted guests, and enthusiastic affirmations were heard from each and all. Mrs. Bradish continued: "Baths, a few rugs and the key to the wine cellar might not be amiss, and the phonograph, by all means, to amuse them."

Petan, bland and self-possessed, stepped forward, fully aware of the wrath which lay behind the words. "How kind is Madame," she said. "The suggestions shall immediately be carried out. There are bits of carpet in the loft, and the servants' bathrooms shall be prepared. And the phonograph—admirable thought. Music shall cause them to forget their misfortunes, and we shall have the little ones dancing——"

"You darling mother," cried Sylvia, aptly following Petan's wily lead. She picked up a baby whose face had been washed and held it toward Mrs. Bradish. "See," she said in a low voice. "Blue eyes, like mine used to be."

Mrs. Bradish's face softened, and she touched the child's cheeks with a gloved finger. "Ahem! Hot bread and milk will not be amiss. Come, Sylvia, the odours are not those of a flower garden. You may tell me about it upstairs."

Sylvia followed her mother, but at the threshold, be it known, she turned, caught Petan's eye, and gave a wicked wink, which the latter acknowledged by a lowering of one eyelid, slowly but significantly. Once in Mrs. Bradish's room, Sylvia dismissed the maid, and with her own hands removed her mother's outdoor garments, while she told her story of that afternoon's events, repressing nothing, save Reizet's mistake in the direction of the subway train, a point which she felt would be regarded with scepticism. The recital was interspersed with caressing touches, lips on cheek and a very clear description of the Princess' reception of similar derelicts, and her interest in and sympathy for them. No

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

pause was allowed until Mrs. Bradish found herself in a deep chair before the fire, in scented tea-gown, and lamplight revealing the rich furnishings of the room, while Sylvia sat on the hearth rug, head against her mother's knee.

Mrs. Bradish had listened to the story with a non-committal face, her judgment not at all blurred by Sylvia's "ways," though her feelings on the subject were softened as Sylvia meant they should be. Reizet's share in the affair, however, she resented. Of course his meeting with Sylvia and subsequent separation from Petan had been an accident, but nevertheless it rankled. Reizet had been the direct cause of these persons being unloaded into her house, without her knowledge or consent. Had the Duke been the aggressor, it would have been another matter, as Mrs. Bradish was neither stony-hearted nor blind to what was fitting, but that Sylvia should have spent some hours in Reizet's society, doing his bidding, among his responsibilities—that was an offence. However, Mrs. Bradish knew human nature, especially her daughter's, and judged it wiser to ignore her enemy in the affair than to arouse Sylvia's sympathies for him by criticism. But that her daughter, so carefully guarded from contact with the sordidness of life, should have spent an afternoon splashing through puddles, laden like a beast of burden, among microbe-infected persons to whom she owed not a jot of obligation—well, it was absurd and highly objectionable, for the reason that it was just that sort of thing which appealed to the girl's sensitive sympathies, and which needed to be discouraged. Sylvia had been trained to certain duties toward the poor—to give, and to give liberally; to feel pity, sympathy and sisterhood with those who suffered, but—at a distance. Charitable organisations, Boards of Directors and all the complications of up-to-date philanthropy were instituted for just such beings as Sylvia, whose heart was prone to outrun her commonsense, and who, having been placed high out of the mire, should

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

remain in her niche, clean, safe, and not too much troubled by what seethed below. Mrs. Bradish had once been below—at least near enough to the depths to realise their unpleasantness, and fiercely resented any approach to them for her daughter. She put out her hand, took Sylvia's chin between thumb and finger and turned the girl's brooding face upward.

"There! Now I can see your eyes. We will talk, for I am glad you have spoken frankly, and don't fancy, when I have finished what I have to say, that I'm not in sympathy with your generous impulses and idealisms, but you are too young to catch a true perspective of such things. Youth sees details exaggerated by proximity, missing that wider view which betrays true proportion. Misery there is and always has been and always will be. It is what Winwoode Reade called 'The Martyrdom of Man,' and what the orthodox call the result of Eve's indiscretion. Wiser heads than yours have accepted the fact, and also decided that it is irremediable, for the causes lie too deep for human solution——"

Sylvia shook her head impatiently. "Oh! Mother, that is all beside the mark. I don't want or expect to make the world over. I'm just selfish about it. I want to make myself over, in a sense. Just because we are aliens in France, why should we be deprived of the benefit of personal contact with the poor? What I did this afternoon doubtless helped them, but it helped me too." The girl threw out both arms and ran her hands up and down over them from shoulder to wrist. "Oh! it felt so good to work, to really work. To use hands, feet, voice and eyes for others—to help 'bear the burden.' There was such a heavenly 'feel' all through me when I lifted those women to their feet from the slime of the world which uses them so ill. That was real, and the queer sense of loneliness I sometimes have vanished quite away. I felt close, close to them, in a way I never feel when with many of our acquaintances. Those poor creatures needed

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

me, yes: but I needed them. Can't you understand, mother dear?"

Mrs. Bradish looked down into the grave eyes raised to hers and frowned. The girl was so like her father at times as to be uncanny; this was one of the times, and a strong hand was needed.

"No, Sylvia," she replied. "I can't fully understand, and can't approve of these emotional preferences for those outside your station in life. Of course we, as possessors, must share with those who do not possess, but to descend in person into the slime you speak of is unnecessary and useless."

Sylvia's lips opened, but Mrs. Bradish struck her hands together sharply, her voice gathering intensity. "Oh! Sylvia, I ask so little in return for all I have done for you—just to remain in the sphere to which I have raised you, and to be happy there. Oh! the years of repression, boredom, lying and fatigue which I have endured—for you; and now you speak as though your life was a burden and are happier when you touch the dregs of life."

Sylvia winced at the note of real pain in her mother's voice, yet felt that she must to her best self be true. For years circumstances had been leading toward this moment, when what she believed and desired must be made clear once for all, or she would be lost under the smother of her mother's ambitions. She leaned both arms on Mrs. Bradish's knees and spoke quietly.

"Dear Mother, I do appreciate all you have done for me, and am grateful with all my heart. Of course you have lifted me high—far up out of the great struggling strife which sweeps humanity along. I dance and play in the sunshine up there, throwing largesse carelessly to those below, who reach up toil-worn hands for it. But do they not ask why I am up above, and they are down below: and what I have done, or they left undone which should place me here, and

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

them there? One feels them down there, earnest, absorbed, alert against misfortune which is ever ready to spring and devour them. Why do they not hate us enough to rise and rend us, rather than to wait patiently for what we choose to give? They may: for in the past hate did terrible things, and I feel, Mother, that sympathy and human fellowship are the only bridges over which the poor and the rich may pass together toward the future. The Christ preached Love, and he was right. The people you and I spend our time with:—is there love between them and us? We despise many of them, is it not mutual? We use them and they us. For what ends? Are they noble, beneficial to either themselves or us? It is an exchange of food, farcical friendship, self-aggrandisement and humbuggery! Oh! Mother dear, one thirsts for honesty, affection, mutual respect, wide horizons. One longs to break through the pettiness, and to mix with real, living beings, who strive, have ideals: who, when they lie down to sleep at night, know that some one is better and happier for their having lived that day. Life can be splendid, filled with endeavour. Our money is a weapon with which to fight disease of souls, minds and bodies, and yet I dance—dance on the edge of deep things, my eyes on the clouds, my ears filled with pretty foolishness: and happiness—it seems afar off——”

Sylvia's head sank on her folded arms and Mrs. Bradish did not move. Bitterness entered her soul. Her eyes, bent on that brown head, saw the past, present and future, and she felt that the structure which she had raised with unspeakable effort was in danger of falling to pieces. Happiness for Sylvia had been the bourne toward which her weary feet had travelled, and now, when the end was nearly reached, Sylvia sighed because happiness seemed afar off. In what had she failed? Suddenly a phrase of her husband's recurred to her mind: “Happiness is not the result of conditions or environment, but consciousness of duty fulfilled to others, and

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

to one's own soul." The soul—was it more than a word of vague import? There had been too little time to think of Sylvia's soul, and now it confronted her, crying for solace. Was that intangible, unseen force to prove stronger than the tangible and visible? Was there a greater power than that of money, after all?

For long Mrs. Bradish had scented this danger, yet ignored it, fancying that days so filled with trivialities would find no place for realities. A thousand insignificant details and incidents flashed through her mind. Sylvia's love for the Bois at unfashionable hours, when Nature, rather than people, held sway there. Sylvia's long absences with Petan in dull museums, or attending lectures given by long-haired enthusiasts across the river. The odd persons of eccentric toilettes and astonishing ideas who sometimes appeared at luncheon or tea hour, significant of Sylvia's contempt for class distinctions. Her impatience with necessary social conventions or the necessary smooth-tongued politeness to persons of worldly advantage. Even Sylvia's rooms betrayed her longing for untrammelled things—pictures of the sea, where no sail burdened its sumptuous liberty: that picture, "The Woe of the World," with its haunting imagery: the mementoes of childish simplicities lovingly preserved and her father's portrait, done in oil from an old photograph which hung opposite her bed, where the dead dreamer watched his dreaming child with understanding eyes. Mrs. Bradish reproached herself that such tendencies should not have been uprooted long ago, for whereas at present only emotional feeling betrayed Sylvia into such impulsive behaviour as that of the afternoon, if allowed to grow it might wreck more serious plans for her happiness, as well as her mother's ambitions. Now a firm hand was needed. Youth was prone to sentimentalise, and Sylvia hardly knew what she thought or felt, save this illogical desire to upset the existent order of things: all very young and

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

foolish. Mrs. Bradish sighed, for in truth she was very weary of effort. For an instant a flash of illuminating wisdom tempted her to allow her daughter's nature to develop on its own lines, but the moment passed and it was a firm hand which she laid on Sylvia's bowed head.

"Sylvia, dear, don't think me a hardened wretch, but, honestly, I have been sifting all you have said, and while I am touched and interested, I can't help but be sorry to hear you say that happiness is afar off. Dear, that sounded morbid. No! don't look hurt. No one will ever tell you the truth for your own good but your mother and your husband, and he may do it less kindly."

Sylvia glanced sidewise at her mother, and smiled. "One truth-teller is enough," she said. "Therefore I'll think twice before I'll annex the husband."

Mrs. Bradish ignored this remark. "You say you're not satisfied with the life I have accomplished for you, fancying that another, out of this sphere, would make you happier. Dear child, it wouldn't. Your very capacity for sympathy would leave you appalled by the immensity of human pain and your inadequacy to cope with it. But the class you want to console has one thing in common with ours—they, as we, try to climb out of the morass, they to reach our level, we to reach one still higher, and you would deny our right and wisdom to do precisely what you want to help them to do. Do you follow my reasoning?"

Sylvia, eyes fixed on the fire, nodded.

"When a soldier aspires to a captaincy," continued Mrs. Bradish, "or an Englishman sighs to be Prime Minister, THAT is called Ambition, with a big 'A.' But, when people desire to raise themselves socially, it is called vulgar 'climbing'—heaven knows why. Yet everything climbs. Evolution is a 'climber' from the protoplasm to resultant Man, and surely you would not call the ambitious protoplasm a

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

snob, because he aspires to become an oyster. No! The law is one of ascent, not descent, and when you are a guest of the Duke, among what represents the best of the most civilised society in the world, you are fulfilling the Law."

Sylvia locked her arms about her knees. "But, mother, are we not fulfilling the Law by climbing spiritually, when we descend socially enough to help others upward? Does the Law mean us to climb with our souls or in a material sense? Monsieur de Reizet said this afternoon, quite naturally, 'noblesse oblige,' and the Princess seemed to me royal when she swept down her staircase and took that baby in her arms."

"Quite so, my dear Sylvia, though there was nothing remarkable about it. But you must learn that in this world it isn't WHAT is done, but WHO does it that matters. The Princess could clean sewing machines on the street and splash about in her white cotton stockings among pots and kettles all day and get only praise for her noble-mindedness, whereas you would only be considered a badly brought up young woman."

"By the world," replied Sylvia, with a curl of her lip which irritated Mrs. Bradish.

"Certainly by the world, in which the Almighty has placed us. We're not in paradise yet, where doubtless the conventions are disregarded. I can't imagine where you get these dreadful, socialistic ideas, which must be nipped while they're vague. Sylvia, my child, in what has transpired since we left America, I represent Cause: you Effect: both fixed principles in the scheme of things. I have fitted you to grace the position I anticipate for you, and when there you will be able to indulge any eccentricity you may fancy, but until you are there you are merely dependent upon the opinion of others. You can not afford to offend their prejudices, tastes or conventions, and——"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"You mean the Duke's prejudices, tastes or conventions?" queried Sylvia.

"He represents them," evaded Mrs. Bradish. "He is an intelligent, conservative man of the world, with your interests at heart——"

"Heart!" murmured Sylvia in an odd voice.

Mrs. Bradish ignored the monosyllable. "I want you to give to the poor," she continued. "I want you to feel sympathy, but if you have any idea of trotting about tainted alleys and hospitals, losing your complexion over the miseries of the world, I will neither countenance nor sympathise; for head, not heart, should govern one's actions if trouble is to be avoided. I can not allow youthful sentimentalities to mar your life at this stage of the game, for no one more than yourself would blame me when youth has passed. Come! Kiss me, for you must know, Sylvia, that I am your best friend as well as your mother."

Sylvia rose and stood looking down into her mother's face, where hard tenacity lurked behind smiles. But she did not stoop for the caress. Eye searched eye for a moment in silence, then, without a word, Sylvia turned away. At the door she paused, looking back, lips parted as though to speak, but evidently thinking better of it, she pushed the portières aside and went out. Mrs. Bradish heard her light tread in the room beyond and then silence, save for the distant roar of Paris. Suddenly the house seemed unduly large and without meaning:—its stillness became significant of emptiness. In all the wide world Mrs. Bradish loved but one human being: the young girl who had turned away, reproach in her eyes.

Mrs. Bradish turned up the electric lights and rang for her maid. While waiting, she stood, one foot on the fender, surveying the room with weary eyes: noting the gilded rail about her royal bed, the pale tints of satin-hung walls and furniture; the costly accoutrements of her dressing-table and

MRS. MORELY MAKES A DISCOVERY

desk, littered with paraphernalia of a busy life, and sighed.

The maid entered, and Mrs. Bradish noted also her obsequious manner, expressionless face and hard eyes. "The grey satin, and green and silver cloak," she said. "Hasten! for the dinner is early because of the opera. Mon Dieu! How I wish I could go to bed."

CHAPTER XII: A CHANGE OF SCENE

MRS. BRADISH fully sympathised with King Canute's feelings, when, standing on her threshold, she beheld water lapping her doormat. The rain had continued with unflagging energy, and the Seine to pervade Paris. It had extinguished her furnace and electric lights, inundated her tiled cellars, and even the haughty precincts of her kitchen, obliging her to find homes in the country for Sylvia's protégés and to have meals brought in boats from a distant restaurant, to be hoisted through her second-story windows ignominiously in baskets.

On that memorable "Black Friday" Paris lay beneath a pall of fear. Traffic was largely suspended and the Lyons railroad was the sole remaining exit from what many people considered a doomed city. Its inhabitants were occupied in packing their belongings or removing furniture and valuables to attics. The vaults of banks had disgorged their important papers, jewels and plate, and these were now hidden in all sorts of extraordinary places, while burglars smacked their lips and issued from their lairs on voyages of predatory discovery.

Mrs. Bradish's experience had taught her that good may be derived from evil, if rightly manipulated. A philanthropic desire to be of use to those who might be useful to her, filled her breast, as she stood balanced on the plank which led from her second-story window to a punt moored before it two feet below. The Avenue Montaigne and its neighbouring streets were now tranquil canals, where boatmen called and small boys fished from drawing-room windows. A strange silence

A CHANGE OF SCENE

brooded, and beyond, on the Pont de l'Alma, an immovable crowd leaned over the parapet watching the flood, which now reached almost to the elbows of the watchers who leaned there. Boats laden with dirt hastened to the Cour la Reine, where the wall was being banked, and most of the palatial residences were deserted. Mrs. Bradish's thoughts flitted up and down those inundated streets, searching for some one to whom she might cast bread, with faith that it might return to her. At last, she had it—Mrs. Morely! Mr. Morely had gone to New York on business and that lady's home must be indeed in a most precarious situation. In a trice Mrs. Bradish was in her punt being poled toward that destination. She found Mrs. Morely in her bedroom, on the second floor, surrounded by her Lares and Penates, which properly belonged below. Chairs, tables and every bit of available space were crammed with bibelots and furniture, rugs and hangings, but she received Mrs. Bradish with cheerful equanimity, offered her a seat on a table, and explained that the authorities had commanded her to vacate the house, as the Seine plainly had intentions on the foundations. Therefore she had engaged rooms at St. Cloud, though she feared a yacht would have to be chartered to get her there, as trains were even then ploughing through two feet of water. Meanwhile, she awaited moving vans, which would soon arrive on rafts, to which her belongings would be removed through the windows by ropes.

"Perhaps you are right to act," sighed Mrs. Bradish, "but I don't dare leave my belongings, and won't until the authorities command me. The foundations of my house are sound, but I have small faith in the servants, and there are so many valuables there."

Mrs. Morely smiled. "But you have Monsieur de Reizet next door," she said. "Surely he is protection, both as a neighbour and as a member of the Relief Committee."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Mrs. Bradish eyed a passing boat absently. "We—that is—I—don't know him very well. There never has been any intimacy between us as neighbours!" Mrs. Morely (wickedly bent on enlightening her visitor) raised surprised eyebrows.

"Really? What a pity," she replied in a tone of commiseration. "Some members of that really good French society are so conservative. However, have patience. Of course, Monsieur de Reizet is spoiled. I know him intimately, and yet see less of him than I would like. He has been so run after by foolishly ambitious mothers that he has become rather wary."

Mrs. Bradish looked bewildered. "Run after—him! He isn't anybody particular; just something in the War Office."

Mrs. Morely smiled pityingly. "Surely, my dear Mrs. Bradish, you know society too well to imagine that a mere title in France has value. One-third of the French titles are bogus, one-third of the Second Empire, and Monsieur de Reizet's name is worth more than some dukedoms. As to his position at the War Office, he is Protocol: the one who meets and arranges everything for royalties when they visit Paris. He is chosen because he is conversant with the intricacies of precedent. He went to London last month with Poincaré and dined at Windsor, and when the Tzar and Tzarina were here he fairly lived with them. He knows most of the crowned heads of Europe."

Mrs. Bradish was dumfounded, but endeavoured to conceal the fact. "The best French are so simple," murmured she, vaguely.

"Quite right. Those who are worth knowing are not running around among Americans. They are in the provinces and the Faubourg; simple, well-bred. Their quarterings are irreproachable and their clothing out of date. Their family life is sober and chaste. They are rich, because they spend nothing, and commit no indiscretions, because they live apart

A CHANGE OF SCENE

from temptations. They perform homely duties with simplicity, and the poor bless them. They would bore us to tears, and we would terrify them."

"How picturesque! Sylvia would adore them," replied Mrs. Bradish. "But their hospitality is as difficult to gain as a—bath."

"Perhaps. But they can't understand our methods in either. They find we exaggerate both. Perhaps we are ostentatious in such things. But the French who we can know, and who are avid of our acquaintance, I do not care for, and am unwilling to receive. Monsieur de Reizet and his aunts are of the former class, but you'll only meet them in their own circle. In modern French society one only finds ghosts of former graces. A nation, like a woman, in passing from youth to age, loses her beauties on the way. The aristocracy of France formerly represented the aristocracy of brains, courage, chivalry, political activity and elegance of manners and life."

Mrs. Bradish pondered a moment, loth to lose an illusion.

"They may not be useful, but their charm—their courtesy—" Mrs. Morely smiled and shook her head. "Comparatively non-existent," she said dryly. "The modern Frenchman is courteous to his mother, his wife (in public), to a pretty woman, and to women of his acquaintance. But to the woman unknown to him, the woman of no importance, the *passée* woman, his courtesy is conspicuous only by its absence. He doesn't understand that fine discrimination for what is fitting and pleasing, which is founded on respect, and is fragrant with the aroma of high thinking and clean living. He will eat your dinners forever, but will not offer in return even a two sous bunch of violets. He will sip absinthe in public with his mistress, with his wife twenty feet away, and see no discourtesy in it."

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Morely!" cried Mrs. Bradish, every Utica modesty startled. "Surely you exaggerate."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

'Not at all. They don't mean any insult; they simply can't see why they shouldn't. Only last night I dined next to a charming man, well considered by society. He was in deep mourning, and, seeing my ignorance, sighed and explained that he wore black for his mistress, a former dancer. He saw no discourtesy in thus alluding to a liaison which had cost his mother a fortune and profound grief.'

"Shocking!" murmured Mrs. Bradish. "Who will marry him?"

"Almost any nice French girl. That very evening a mutual friend remarked what a perfect husband he would make because of his capacity for fidelity."

Mrs. Bradish flushed with indignation and seated herself more securely on the table, swinging her feet with agitated feeling. "What a code! I prefer our American divorces from such men. We exact fidelity and respect from our husbands or we'll have none of them. This feudal idea that a wife is a chattel is obsolete with us. Should a man treat his valet with rudeness or fail to keep an agreement entered into his valet gives notice. We American women do the same, and I feel that it proves not our moral laxity, but our moral ideality."

"You won't find the Duc de Petrinac agreeing with you," replied Mrs. Morely, "for all his pretence of modernity. A man like him simply can't understand why a woman should flout the sincerity of his protestations of love because she is married to another man."

"Surely a serious man, like the Duke, doesn't dally in others' pastures?" queried Mrs. Bradish.

"Oh! doesn't he? Ask his wife's ghost the first time you go to a spiritual seance."

"But if he truly loved a pure girl," replied Mrs. Bradish, "he would love honour more."

Mrs. Morely's laugh rang out with genuine mirth. "Honour!

A CHANGE OF SCENE

A Frenchman would challenge you to a duel did you insinuate he had taken a pocket handkerchief from your drawer, not intending to return it; but chaff him regarding his success with another man's wife, and he'll vow you the most delightful woman in the world."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Bradish, "it is all horrid, but one has to learn tolerance for others' points of view. But an American is bored by what has to be hidden and lied about."

"A Frenchman," replied Mrs. Morely, "is bored with anything which does not necessitate intrigue. His brain is built on those lines, and it requires an astute brain to be a successful lover in France. In America only a heart is needed. A Frenchman thinks it great and noble to jump off the Pont Neuf for Love's sake rather than practise self-denial. We American women find it nobler to bear a burden than to throw it into the Seine."

"But they must—love—to do it," replied Mrs. Bradish.

"Emotional brain-storms, my dear. Love which takes refuge in hysterical suicide isn't worthy the name. Woman, like a Frenchman, is prey: to be pursued to the finish, without scruple or mercy or consideration for others. He loves—Love, not THE woman. His wife is—the mother of his children, marked by a dot: not more."

"But surely there are exceptions," said Mrs. Bradish, recalling the Duke's faithful and tender devotion to Sylvia, replete with restraint and respect.

"Of course," replied Mrs. Morely, recalling Reizet's face in the subway train: lit by feeling and honest strength. "And the exception is worth while, because of the opposing forces which it has surmounted, of education, example and environment. When a Latin loves in the best sense, it is a gift from God and should be cherished."

Mrs. Bradish agreed, and rose, feeling that Mrs. Morely, while undoubtedly correct in much which she had imparted,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

was prejudiced. Her salon was strictly American, and Mrs. Bradish wondered why she could not be equally contented in New York or Boston if she disliked the French. It hardly seemed fair to enjoy the externals of France while sniffing at those who created it. She moved toward the door and bade her good-bye from a barrel at the bottom of the stair, where mounting waters lapped.

Meanwhile a series of seemingly unimportant incidents were being linked into a chain of grave import to those concerned in this recital.

Jack had sent word to Sylvia that they were free to enjoy a canter together in the Bois undetected, as Jehan had been away for several days and would not return until that evening. Sylvia, only too delighted, had evaded her groom, and joined her youthful swain where deer stared at their happy faces. Sylvia hoped Jack would voluntarily allude to his brother's absence, but the former had no reason to fancy Sylvia interested, and Sylvia finally was obliged to ask, casually, of course.

Jack informed her that Jehan had gone to Amsterdam on some business connected with the War Office, and had charged him and his aunts to tell no one until his return. As that was to be within a few hours, Jack felt that Sylvia might be told without detriment to the State. Jack also remarked that his brother had seemed unusually shaken from his accustomed gravity. He had swung him to the ceiling, promised him two polo ponies for Cambridge later, hugged his aunts instead of kissing their finger-tips, and even chaffed Philippe on the joys of possible matrimony. "You'd have thought he had a bride tucked away in his own pocket," concluded Jack, "so beaming was he, and the queer part of it was that he forbade any of us to mention where he had gone until to-day. It seemed to be a secret he was afraid to share with any one. But to-day is here, and so I can tell."

A CHANGE OF SCENE

But Sylvia cared little for the secret. She gazed aloft to where clouds hung low above the bare branches, and said in an indifferent voice: "You fancy he has—a bride tucked away?"

Jack laughed in derision. "Bride! Not he. He has no use for girls, and what on earth would Jehan do with a wife? He thinks Paul all kinds of a fool for wanting to marry you, and that one fool is enough in the family. Besides, you're keeping yourself for me—*n'est-ce-pas?*"

Sylvia laughed and agreed, and an hour later, at the luncheon table, where the Duke was being introduced to the delights of a buckwheat cake, she volunteered the hope that his cousin, Monsieur de Reizet, would not be deterred by the odds from returning that afternoon to Paris. The Duke glanced up from his plate with surprise, and betrayed the fact that he had been ignorant of Jehan's departure and expected return. However, he asked no questions and merely remarked that Amsterdam was a quaint city. However, later, in the drawing-room, while Mrs. Bradish was at her desk in a distant corner, the Duke asked casually at what hour his cousin was expected to return, but Sylvia was unable to give any further information.

When the Duke left the Bradish domicile he was rowed round the corner to his cousin's house, through the gate and across the garden to the terrace steps, quite like a Venetian cavalier, but whatever his reason for the visit might have been he did not stay long, and on his exit bade the man row to the Pont de l'Alma, where he scrambled to terra firma across some barrels to the sidewalk. There he consulted his watch, hailed a cab and directed him to the nearest telephone office, on the corner of the Avenue d'Iéna and rue Bassano. Bidding the cocher wait, the Duke hurriedly entered the bureau and gave the number, "Central 39.50." A moment passed, which apparently seemed of unconscionable length to the Duke, be-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

fore he was bidden to a booth. In his haste he failed to close the door, and the boy outside heard these incomprehensible words, uttered in a soft voice: "Be ready for turtles in three days."

That was all. Apparently the person addressed knew all about the turtles, for there was neither any question asked nor further information given. The Duke came out, hurriedly paid for the telephone, and went out quickly. Again he consulted his watch; then told the cocher to go to Cook's Agency, on the Champs Élysées. There he was kept waiting while three English maiden ladies discussed the advisability of buying through tickets to Rome or going round by way of the Italian Lakes. The Duke hemmed and hawed, but the clerk would have none of him until the last ticket was stamped and signed and change made for each of the three; then he inquired, with a weary air, what Monsieur desired.

"The hours of trains arriving from Amsterdam," snapped the Duke. The clerk looked at him insolently and slowly searched the time table.

"There are three trains from Amsterdam," he remarked at last. "Nine-thirty in the morning, two-twenty and nine at night."

Once more on the sidewalk, the Duke again looked at his watch, and saw it lacked ten minutes to three. He spoke crisply to the cocher. "Drive as fast as speed limit allows to 28 rue de l'Université," he said, and got into the cab, slamming the door behind him. The Duke sat on the edge of the seat, seeing nothing of the streets they passed through, and sensing not at all their congestion, or the strange silence of the throngs which crowded the pavements. His thoughts were busy, intent and concentrated, and again his fine hand from which he had drawn his glove stroked his pointed beard to its point, his polished nails coming together with nicety.

More than once the cab was compelled to retrace its way

A CHANGE OF SCENE

because of the submerged streets, and the Duke swore softly; but at last the cab stopped before number 28, and the Duke descended, rang the old-fashioned bell and inquired for Monsieur le Vicomte de Bellecize. Alas! Monsieur le Vicomte was not at home, and the Duke turned on his heel with ill-concealed annoyance. As he was about to enter the cab again he hesitated and returned to the door, in the aperture of which the servant still stood.

"Do you happen to know where Monsieur le Vicomte might be?" the Duke inquired.

The servant raised eyebrows, shoulders and hands with resigned sorrow. "Helas! I know only that he is out. There is the Jockey Club, receptions, certain—ahem!—ladies——"

The Duke sprang into the cab and ordered the driver to the Jockey Club, and a few moments later entered that sacred precinct and looked about. The usual number of elaborately dressed young men were scattered about the rooms, playing auction for large stakes, or grouped about tables, sipping their *péritifs*, while stories circulated of their conquests with the air, wherein no names were mentioned, though pains were taken to make identity clear, in the usual French masculine fashion. But no little Vicomte was to be seen, nor had any one seen him that day.

The Duke ordered an absinthe and called for the *Figaro*. With the glass in one hand, which seemed none too steady, he eagerly scanned the column of receptions for that day, and, with the pencil on his watch-chain, made sundry notes on the back of an envelope. Then, without further greeting to his friends, he went out, and again hailed a cab. During the next half hour he drove from house to house, entered each, but remained only a few moments, and each time that he gave a new address to the driver his voice and manner were more curt and irritable.

At last he found himself before the portals of the Princess,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

and learned that she was at home and that he whom he sought was there also, having come to inquire concerning a migraine, from which Madame la Princess had been suffering. The Duke paid the driver and hurriedly sped across the court, where rain danced on the pavement and gurgled from the gargoyles above. But once within, his haste slipped from him as completely as did his overcoat, and when he entered the salon, where his hostess and guests sat toasting their toes on the fender before a meagre fire, the Duke apparently had no other concern than to inquire for the migraine. He also expressed surprise and pleasure at finding the Vicomte there, and led the conversation to trivial pleasantries, suavely and deliberately, as though there was plenty of time for pointless conversation of no particular importance.

But, of course, the flood soon became a topic of discussion, and it was not the Duke who introduced it, but his hostess, who deplored the fact that waters, having crept through the masonry of her basement, had entirely swamped her beloved mushroom beds there, which she tended herself by candle light. The tender succulence of those mushrooms was famed, and their loss made her realise that her habitation was in danger, as nothing else could have done.

"One feels like the dove from the ark," said the Duke, "searching for a friendly mountain on which to abide until the waters subside. Alas! My cellars also are ten feet deep in water, and I have vainly tried to get accommodation at St. Cloud, but all high places around Paris are taken, and there is Margot, with a delicate throat. My château in Normandy is inaccessible, as the Gare de l'Ouest is drowned out, else I would invite you all there. Madame Bradish is in despair. Jehan, fortunately, sent his aunts and Jack away in time, but——"

The little Vicomte leaned eagerly forward. "What a dodderhead am I. There is my château as empty as a husk, high

A CHANGE OF SCENE

the hill above the Loire. For long have I desired that dame Bradish and her incomparable daughter should have pleasure of beholding my turtles. Now is the appointed time. They, you, Princess, and you, Petrinac, shall come here with any one you like. Madame Morely also, else the Americans might find us too French a party. At once shall I telegraph Madame; permit me to ring for a servant to take a message to the bureau, as my cook, being amoureuse of the valet at Monsieur Randon's château, finds herself with difficulty, and——"

The Princess laughed and touched a bell on the table beside her. "You are not as slow as your turtles, my friend," said she. "But I find it an excellent idea, though perhaps too large a proportion of ladies for gaiety. A pity Monsieur Randon is not at his château——"

"But he is, *chère amie*," cried the Vicomte, "though, alas! the present of no use to the ladies. Have you not seen the papers of his motor accident?"

The Duke answered nothing, nor did there seem to be an opportunity, so eloquent was the Princess' surprise and sympathy.

"And you say Monsieur Randon is at his château?"

"Yes; recuperating, though he is still unconscious. To think that skidding on a bit of mud could thus render useless the finest brain in France," replied the Vicomte.

The Duke rose and faced them on the hearth-rug, hands beneath his coat-tails. "You remember Pascal's remark, that if Cleopatra's nose had been a little longer or redder the history of the world might have been changed. I regret the accident, but we will all have the pleasure of nursing him or, at least, helping him to pass the hours without ennui; that is, if you, Monsieur, really desire our society at your château."

The Princess shook her finger at the Vicomte. "I, for one, will go, whether he desires it or not, having accepted the

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

invitation, for I have no mind to remain here till I float away on the bosom of the Seine. And by all means, have the Americans, for they are as amusing as a cinematograph. Madame Bradish—a joy. She fancies she has a salon, whereas she only keeps a restaurant.”

The Duke was nettled at this comparison of his future mother-in-law, but dared not show it then. He laughed heartily, revealing his white teeth. “Excellent, dear Princess. However, it is well that some one can employ a chef who mixes sauces which we can no longer afford. You dine there?”

“Mais oui,” replied his hostess. “Wherefore should I not dine there? It is agreeable to see people I have never seen before, and who ask nothing of me save my acquaintance. They all leave cards here the next day, but get no further than the concierge.”

The Vicomte rose, anxious to be off, for an idea had but to germinate beneath his pomatumed wig, to be immediately put into execution. He and the Duke made their adieux, and arranged that two days later they would all meet at the Gare de Lyon at 10.45 A. M. with the rest of the party, which the Vicomte would at once invite personally. The Duke suggested another man, but when several were suggested found none of them properly sympathetic to the American ladies. The twain parted with cordiality, going in different directions, and on the corner the Duke paused, looking back at his little friend, balanced on high heels as he tottered on them across the wet street. Then he hailed a cab and gaily ordered the driver to Mrs. Bradish’s, that he might prepare her for the invitation before the Vicomte’s arrival. When he had traversed the plank across the water into her drawing-room window, he found that lady pale and worried, interviewing two gendarmes who, in high rubber boots, had just emerged from the kitchen precincts. The Duke listened as they pointed out the necessity of vacating the house while the

A CHANGE OF SCENE

pumps were employed. They pointed out that it was neither sanitary nor safe to remain even on the two lower floors, but that the servants could continue to inhabit the upper story and a night watchman the lower. Petan stood silently by during the discussion, and when the Duke interrupted the flow of the gendarmes' eloquence with the Vicomte's proposition to migrate to his château, Petan nodded a silent approbation. Mrs. Bradish also welcomed the suggestion with enthusiasm when she learned that Mrs. Morely and the Princess were to be included, and a few moments later, when the Vicomte arrived, he met with a warm welcome. Mrs. Bradish was enchanted to accept his invitation and agreed to be at the Gare de Lyon at the appointed hour with Sylvia.

The Vicomte, knowing Mrs. Bradish's method of thought and action, had previously telephoned to Mrs. Morely and gained her acceptance, so Mrs. Bradish congratulated herself on the prospect of several days at least with desirables, where intimacy could be cultivated.

That evening the Duke dined early at his club and a little before nine was at the Gare du Nord. He first inquired at what platform the train from Amsterdam would arrive, and then took up a position on the main platform behind a newspaper kiosk where his eyes could command the gate through which arrivals passed.

The glass-domed roof was partially hidden by steam and ascending smoke, through which multitudinous electric lights flickered. Sharp screams of escaping steam sounded above the din of hurrying feet, rolling trunk vans, and signalling bells, but the Duke seemed to hear nothing of them, so absorbed was he in thought.

At last the glare of an engine's headlight was seen where converging tracks melted into outer darkness, and a moment later the great Express glided along beside the platform as gently as a boat through summer seas. The Duke now hur-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

ried to the gate next to that where Reizet would pass, and stood alert, head turned away. But had any one in that absorbed throng taken the trouble to watch his face narrowly, they would have seen that his eyes beneath the wide brim of his soft hat turned to the right as far as sight permitted, and that when those eyes perceived Reizet emerge through the gate, the Duke placed himself directly in the former's path. Then a singular thing occurred. The Duke, within a few feet of his cousin, ignoring his proximity, raised his hat, as though in farewell to a woman near him, who was hurrying away, and called "adieu" after her, adding "*bon voyage*," loudly, though the woman evidently supposed the salutation was meant for some one else or was too hurried to acknowledge it.

By this time Reizet almost ran into his cousin, and put a hand in friendly salute on the other's shoulder. The Duke started and turned with surprise, allowing a glad look of recognition to light his face. "*Toi!*" he cried, taking the outstretched hand. "What are you doing here? Ah! Yes. Some one told me you had run out of town. What luck to meet you. I was bidding good-bye to a friend who crosses to England, but now we can cheer each other's dreary way across Paris."

Reizet deliberately accepted the welcome without enthusiasm. He looked tired, but carried himself erect, as though a burden, long borne, had slipped from his shoulders. In his hand he carried a valise, shabby, but devoid of those many hotel and railroad labels which bespeak much travel. The Duke's quick eye noted that two recent labels had been scratched off, save their edges, which told nothing.

"Am as hungry as a wolf," said Reizet, when they were in the "taxi," speeding through puddles. "I didn't want to bother the aunts with an extra dinner, so wired them I'd dine elsewhere. Come with me, Paul. I've plenty to tell you. Your

A CHANGE OF SCENE

window is down. Shout to the chauffeur to take us to——”

“Would you scorn Duval’s?” asked the Duke. “Certainly no one we know will be there, and you can get something simple. There is one near here. I’ll tell him.”

The restaurant, with its tiled floor and mahogany tables, was empty save for a young woman perched high behind the desk, whose blonde, ondulé hair and impressive good looks were as fresh as morning. Two waitresses in black dresses and white imitation linen cuffs reaching to their elbows, caps and large aprons, gossiped, and were called to attention by an old man in a skull-cap, seated behind a table by the door, who gave each of the newcomers a printed slip. The two men chose a table in the farther corner by the wall and hung up their coats and hats on the hooks above. Lentil soup, a fried sole *au beurre*, a filet, sauce Béarnaise and a *rix à l’imperatrice* were ordered, and then Reizet surprised his cousin by ordering a quart of Pommery Sec at the extravagant price of twenty francs.

“La! La! La! We grow extravagant,” laughed the Duke. “What meaneth it?”

Reizet laughed aloud, ignoring the waitresses. “It means, my cousin, that I am a happy man, and that you are to drink to that happiness. To-night I see the end of a long, dusty road whereon I have travelled too long. A garden of enchantment is in sight. To gain it I will dare all things. Were even you in my way I’d swing you aside—pouf!”

The Duke leaned forward. “Then you have succeeded,” he said eagerly, unfeignedly glad.

“I have,” Reizet replied. His face glowed, and taking the wine, he poured out two brimming glasses. “We’ll not wait for food before drinking,” he laughed, “for the Hindoos claim that joy is more complete when the brain is confused by an empty stomach. So, here’s to Success!”

The two men set down their empty glasses and smiled at

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

each other across the table, then Reizet began to eat, having surreptitiously cleaned his spoon on his napkin below the table's edge.

"Tell me about it," said his cousin after a few minutes had sufficed to appease hunger.

"There is so little to tell, for great events are often of diminutive proportions. I found the inventor gravely ill and anxious to terminate the matter. He gave me the secret solution: or rather a copy of the ingredients, sealed, of course, as it is none of my business. I have only to deliver it to Randon, and then:—well, I'll cut coupons for the rest of my life. And there will be other things——"

Reizet paused and looked across the table at his cousin with a curious expression of daring mingled with glee, like that of a child bent on stealing jam from under the nose of another marauder. The Duke noticed the look but failed to catch its significance. He pushed bread-crumbs aside and leaned forward.

"So you have to deliver it to Randon," he said casually. "That is awkward, isn't it?"

"Why?"

"Considering he is lying unconscious at his château, his head broken from a motor accident."

"Whew!" breathed Reizet, leaning back in his chair.

"Quite so," replied the Duke. "I don't envy you, carrying about that valuable packet for several days. Can't you deliver it to another representative?"

Reizet looked perturbed. "No! Those are my orders: to deliver it into Randon's own hands, and I have no right to act on my own discretion, otherwise. Of course I could telegraph the owner, but he is desperately ill, and——"

"And Randon will be conscious and probably able to see you in two or three days at the farthest," the Duke replied. "The doctors say it is more shock than anything, and that

A CHANGE OF SCENE

nothing serious will accrue. Meanwhile, only be prudent. Don't leave the packet about——"

Reizet smiled dryly. "Hardly. Considering that my whole future, my honour and perhaps the welfare of France lie in that little packet, it isn't likely that I'll light a cigar with it by mistake. I keep it——"

Reizet suddenly closed his lips, for something in the Duke's expression reminded him of the latter's warning, and he decided to prove his discretion.

"Where do you keep it?" asked the Duke, smiling. "In your hat?"

Reizet nodded toward the valise beside him, as though it contained a dearly loved friend rather than shirts and socks.

"And when you sleep?" asked the Duke.

Reizet laughed softly into his cousin's eyes. "Tell it not," he whispered. "At night I put it in one of my socks, on the floor, just under the edge of my bed, where no self-respecting burglar would dream of looking."

The Duke smiled back, well pleased apparently with so ingenious a hiding-place. "Clever," he said, lighting a cigarette, his eyes on the sputtering match which he threw into his empty glass. "By-the-way, Jehan, I have a sudden inspiration. You say you have to give the packet direct to Randon. As luck will have it, Bellecize has invited the Bradish mother and daughter with one or two others to his château for a few days, as the flood has drowned us all out. You might come, too, and so be on hand for Randon's first hour of recovery."

Reizet looked up surprised and pleased from his coffee. "What luck. I don't see how, though——"

"Oh! I could arrange it, perhaps," said the Duke. "The Princess thought us too manless a party. I can suggest——"

"But Madame Bradish——"

"She needn't know till she gets there."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"And Mademoiselle——"

"She'll have to put up with you for once. I'll keep her occupied, so you and she will have no chance to quarrel."

"Awfully good of you, Paul," said Reizet, stirring his coffee with lowered lids. "I can stand it if she can. Do your best for me, like a good cousin, and let me know, as of course it would be a convenience, and I should feel safer there than here in Paris. Ye gods. How relieved I'll be to be rid of the thing."

The two men rose and settled the bill. As they stood outside waiting for a cab, the Duke recurred to the contemplated visit.

"You may consider yourself invited," he said, "for of course Bellecize will be only too pleased to have you, though I'll have him send you a line for convention's sake. I'll leave you here, as I'm going on to the club. Good night. Day after to-morrow at the Gare de Lyon, and——"

Reizet shook hands. "No. Not by that train. Look for me later. Mrs. Bradish might order the engine reversed if she saw me. Good night." The men parted and the Duke watched the cab until it disappeared round the corner, then he hailed another, and gave an address which was not in the quarter of his club.

The next morning, while Petan was giving out linen from scented piles in the glass-shelved closets, a note was brought to her. She turned it to and fro wondering as to the identity of the writer, and finally opened it. She glanced down the page unseeing, till she spied the name, and reeled: stared again, and then flew to the door and locked it, her heart going pit-a-pat with delightful agitation. Thus the note ran:

"Madame:—I beg you to be at the window overlooking the area this evening at eleven o'clock. A matter of im-

A CHANGE OF SCENE

portance demands your attention and your—discretion. I need not have to ask you to be silent.

“JEHAN DE REIZET.”

Petan was in a flutter, for surely it was almost like having a lover of one's own. She tore the note into bits and burned them in the grate, then unlocked the door. That evening she made a toilette. Her best black silk, an extra switch of hair, fresh ruffles at neck, and even did she borrow of Madame's lip salve; for the eternal feminine was strong in Petan's breast. At eleven she was at the window. Below, water reflected stars from a tattered sky, and the air hung heavily, warm as May. Then a voice spoke to her ravished ear; the same which had called her “idiot” so delightfully, long ago, when she had explained the danger of breaking glass on St. Landris' Day. “*Bon soir*,” the voice said, and Petan could now dimly discern Reizet in evening dress. “It is a pity we have to share a secret with the night,” he continued. “It would assuage my fears, Madame, if you would lean out the window where I can see that it is verily you and—no one else. One never knows——”

“Fear nothing,” replied Petan in a hoarse whisper, revealing herself boldly, and Reizet saw for the third time that neat figure and head, with its faint moustache and shrewd eyes. She had once told him, when he left her in the cab at one in the morning, that she “sank from view, the sea of oblivion reclaimed her.” Fate had been of another mind, and Reizet felt suddenly that she was forever part of vital interests. He bowed profoundly from the window.

“I do fear nothing,” he replied, “now that I see the Discreet One, in whose discretion I am about to place my trust. May I hasten my explanation, as time presses and as I said before, one never knows who may come to this window. Tomorrow Madame Bradish and her daughter go to visit the

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Vicomte, is it not so? *Bien!* I also go, but it is of paramount importance that the ladies do not know it—until they get there. I have told my host and my cousin that I would go by a later train, but have since changed my mind. Instead, I go third class on the same train as the rest of the party, and knowing how dear to you is the health of Mademoiselle, and how crowded will be the train, I am here to suggest that you bid Mademoiselle take the air whenever the train stops at stations; well in the rear, where first-class passengers rarely go. Am I asking too much?"

Petan was nearly speechless as this fine plot unfolded, but her delight knew no bounds. "I am to tell Mademoiselle?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Reizet. "She is to know nothing that her mother doesn't know. And there is one further detail. Now, in place of her personal maid, would you—er—could you act——"

"Affection knows no class distinctions, Monsieur. Leave that to me."

"You are all goodness, Madame, for which the future shall reward you. Alas! The area does not permit me to kiss your hand. It will keep. Good night, I hasten to depart, for some one is below."

Reizet hastily withdrew and Petan sighed while she trembled. What a lover! She congratulated herself for having frankly told him of their unexpected meeting that day on the flooded street, and that she knew all regarding his unavowed passion for her precious Sylvia. It was good to have no fence between their three hearts, and to be thus allowed to mingle her usefulness with their happiness.

CHAPTER XIII: TURTLES

WHEN Mrs. Bradish with the rest of the party drove, in the antiquated omnibus of the Vicomte, with its driver in red waistcoat and multitudinous buttons, beneath the groined archway of the château, perched high above the Loire, twilight idealised the park and walled terraces. Tourelles' pointed roofs, ivied walls and mossy flagging told their story of age far more frankly than did their sprightly host, who received them with warm-hearted hospitality. His mauve, knitted waistcoat of silk, lavender socks and tie and his waxed moustachios fairly cried aloud their gaiety. He hovered to and fro, removing wraps, chattering like a paroquet, while Mrs. Bradish swept appraising eyes about the beautiful hall.

When the party reached their rooms in the West wing, Mrs. Bradish started on a voyage of discovery. She found that the long windows of her room, the dressing-room and Sylvia's room all opened on a stone balcony which ran along the façade of the house on the second story. Petan's room opened on it also, though farther down the passage, and between, were a couple of vacant rooms. Their own quarters were sparsely but splendidly furnished, though devoid of any signs of that comfortable luxury to which Mrs. Bradish had become accustomed.

"Humph!" said she, still in her moleskin coat. "It's as cold as charity and there isn't a sign of a bath. I don't believe those curtains have been taken down and cleaned since the reign of Louis the Fourteenth."

But Sylvia danced a gay *pas seul*. "It's enchanting. The

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

furniture has dear, real little wormholes in it: not just holes bored by an awl. That naughty, clever Cardinal Mazarin once slept in my bed, and there's a hole in the wall of our dressing-room where they used to stick their heads through to be powdered without soiling their fine clothes. Oh! Mother, dear. Look!"

Mrs. Bradish did look, and recoiled, staring at a small black object which moved toward the fire across the polished parquet. It was a turtle, scaly as to paws and indifferent as to manner. Sylvia lifted it with a laugh to the light of one of the candles. "Look!" she cried. "Its name is inlaid on its back in gold. It's Madame de Maintenon, who bit off Montepan's leg in a quarrel over a cabbage leaf:—naughty dear!"

Mrs. Bradish pulled out her hatpins and threw her hat on the bed. "Sylvia," she said, "put that horrid beast in the passage at once. I refuse to share my room with it. If I had my way I'd make Madame de Pompadour into soup."

Sylvia retired, and fifteen minutes later Petan came to assist her to dress. The latter had fully investigated rooms, servants, the chef, filled hot water bottles and ordered fires built double their size in the microscopic hearths. She had also learned that Margot and her nurse were already there, having come by an earlier train, and were even then being settled in the room next to her own and adjoining the Duke's, which proved to be next to Mrs. Bradish's dressing-room. The Vicomte had given the Duke others, but they had proved too exposed to the North for Margot's comfort, and the Duke had asked for these.

Petan, having laid a filmy nightdress and satin mules before the fire, proceeded to take down Sylvia's hair before the dressing-table. They spoke in subdued voices instinctively, as conspirators should, and now Sylvia nodded silently to the door between her mother's room and hers. Petan tiptoed softly across and closed it, unaware to Mrs. Bradish, who

TURTLES

as already half asleep on the great bed, whose damask hangings she had disrespectfully pulled back and tucked behind the head of the bed, that air might enter her up-to-date lungs.

Now be it known that Sylvia had discovered Petan's mistake as to the identity of the supposed lover whose curls she had patted through the fence, but for reasons of her own she kept silent. Petan still knew nothing of Jack's part in the affair, or in fact that Sylvia knew him. Sylvia refrained from explaining to herself why she allowed Petan to continue to confuse the two Reizets, and allowed complications to take their chances of being ultimately unravelled. Not knowing that Petan had met Jehan before she herself had done so, that she had ever spoken of the "affair" to him, while supposing Reizet to have been Jack, Sylvia failed to appreciate the danger she ran in leaving Petan in ignorance of her mistake, and continued to speak of meetings, letters, mutual love and hopes with mischievous glee, thoroughly enjoying the confusion of facts and impressions given. It had also come somehow rather agreeable to confuse the two in her own imagination, and to transfer Jack's ardent and frank adoration to his brother in her thoughts. Of course Petan's belief helped the illusion and made it easier. No name was ever mentioned between them:—it was always—"He."

Sylvia beamed upon Petan in the mirror. "Petan," she whispered, "isn't it fun? Mother hasn't the remotest idea he is in the house. I was terrified at the last station for fear he'd see me with him. Oh! it was exciting. He told me about the plot and how he arranged it with you.

"Humph!" murmured Petan, inwardly charmed, and imagining the ardent sentiments she had permitted Reizet to press on station platforms, whereas he had never uttered a word of love to Sylvia in his life nor did he know that Petan supposed he had.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"He told me such interesting things: particularly why he is here. You can not imagine, my Petan, what an important matter hangs on this visit of his here. When he went away it was to Amsterdam, from where he brought back a packet which means everything to him: fortune, honour, and—er—something else he says he can't tell me about yet. You see, this packet contains something very valuable, perhaps jewels, I don't know. He has to deliver it personally to some one who lives near here. He is anxious to get rid of it, for he says it would ruin him if it got lost. Some one has trusted him, and his future depends on its safe delivery."

"He looks a muscular young man," remarked Petan, her mouth full of hairpins, somewhat chagrined that business, and not Sylvia, had brought him to the château.

"OH! He's safe enough here," smiled Sylvia. "Now make me pretty—for the Duke. Mother complained on the way down here that I looked bored while he talked to me on the train, so I'll make up for it to-night. How I detest the country in winter. We'll be so dull here, with nothing doing. It's so still I can hear my feelings speak."

Surprises were in store for Mrs. Bradish later. As they descended the stair-case for dinner, who should come forward but Jehan de Reizet, hand outstretched in suave greeting for mother and daughter, surprised, but apparently none too pleased to meet them. "When did you arrive?" asked Mrs. Bradish acidly.

"I came on the same train as the others," he replied, "but had business to attend to en route."

"Ah!" drawled Mrs. Bradish, turning away indifferently.

Mrs. Morely and the Princess stood near, and the latter whispered to Mrs. Morely: "We—know a thing or two, don't we? The dears! That glass of beer I went for at the first stop——"

TURTLES

"SHH," whispered Mrs. Morely. "Have a care. A word from us might make havoc——"

They all went out to dinner, which progressed as such dinners do, for excellent as was the cooking, every one knows that the success of a dinner depends not on what is upon the table, but what is upon the chairs. The host told naughty stories which the Princess capped, while at the other end of the table Mrs. Morely with the Duke on one side and Reizet on the other did her best to monopolise the former that Sylvia and Jehan might enjoy themselves. But Mrs. Bradish had her eye upon them, and it was edifying to see Sylvia's coquetry of eye, gesture and smile across the table for the Duke's undoing and her polite indifference to Reizet, who apparently thought only of his food and Mrs. Morely.

The latter taking advantage of the Duke's absorption in Sylvia, said in a low voice to Reizet: "I saw you at the station—you and she. What does it mean? Be honest. I am your friend."

Reizet looked into those kind grey eyes which held experience and memories of sorrow and joys in their depths, and submitted to his impulse to confide. He needed encouragement and understanding, for hostility to his hidden desires was in the air, depressing his sub-conscious self, and he felt uneasy, almost fearful, of what he hardly knew.

He leaned forward, took a menu and pointed to the third line with an air of interest. She too leaned toward him, her eyes on his finger. "It means," he said in a low voice, "that I adore—her! She holds me in the hollow of her sweet hands, soul, mind and body. No! Don't move. We are watched. Am I a cad to try when he was first on the field? Am I obligated to refrain——?"

Mrs. Morely still studied the menu. "Obligated to—him? *Jamais de la vie*. You are obligated only to an honest love. He will make her wretched, if he should ever get her, but I

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

doubt if he ever will. She is soft, sweet, docile, but as evasive as quicksilver. He will put out his hand, but he will grasp—nothing.”

“If I could only make her—care.”

“She does.”

De Reizet dropped the menu. “Mon Dieu!” he whispered. “What makes you think so?”

“Because she makes believe so well she doesn’t care. We women are like that. Watch her bewitch your cousin, for whom she cares not at all. She——” But just then chairs were pushed back, and men and women passed into the salon together. Reizet waxed bold. Beneath Mrs. Bradish’s stony glare of disapproval, he followed Sylvia into the embrasured window, stuck a cushion behind her with an easy air of proprietorship, and seated himself opposite, one leg drawn under him. Outside, the terrace’s wet flagging reflected the countless candles in the great lustred chandelier, and beyond, the park lay beneath a shroud of mist, forbidding and sombre. But within, all was colour and warmth, and Sylvia’s spirits mounted.

“Well, Mademoiselle,” said Reizet, smiling, “here we are. Commend my perspicacity.”

Sylvia laughed. “If Mother ever finds out——”

“Let her—now. She can’t take me by my shoulders and run me out of the house. She can’t weigh more than fifty kilos——”

“Her displeasure weighs—tons,” said Sylvia. “But look, Monsieur. What is happening. Since she and Mrs. Morely retired together into that corner, Mother no longer looks hatpins at us, though I’m talking to the enemy of our house.”

Reizet glanced to that distant corner and beheld Mrs. Morely talking rapidly in Mrs. Bradish’s ear, and that lady looking at the Duke with a puzzled frown. “There is a reason which perhaps I might explain,” said Reizet, “if I dared.

TURTLES

Some day—but Mrs. Morely is my friend, and her friendship means more than tea and talk. She has my interests at heart——”

Sylvia ignored his words and glance, and inconsequently asked: “Did you tell Mother the business reason which brought you here? That might calm her wrath, to know that—we—had nothing to do with it.”

“No! I told her nothing. That is only for you. SEE—I trust you.” He drew from an inner pocket a small package and laid it in Sylvia’s lap. It was done up in heavy blue paper, tied with pink tape and sealed with the Arms of France. Sylvia took it between her fingers and turned it to and fro with a grave face. Just then the Duke strolled across the room and joined them.

“What have we here?” he asked pleasantly, his glance on the package. He picked it up, felt it, turned it to and fro and looked down reproachfully at his cousin. “Jehan, do you think this quite wise?” he asked.

Reizet took the packet and returned it to his pocket.

“If I were Pandora,” laughed Sylvia, “I’d beg to see its contents, but secrets are burdens.”

“Quite right,” said the Duke. “By the way, Jehan, be careful what you do with it at night. Hadn’t you better put it in the safe?”

“Never,” said Reizet. “A scoundrel goes to a safe like a bee to a honey pot. No! It is safer with me for a day or two.”

“Under your pillow?” laughed the Duke. “See! Mademoiselle is wide-eyed with curiosity.”

Sylvia became wide-eyed with indignation. “Not at all! Nothing would induce me to know where he keeps it. As I said, I don’t like burdens.” She rose, as Mrs. Bradish came forward. “Of course Mother is tired after a flood and a journey.”

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

A few moments later host and guests mounted the stairs, candles in hand. The Vicomte said good night at its head, as his rooms were in the main portion of the house. The Duke accompanied Mrs. Bradish down the passage, and Sylvia gave her hand prettily to Mrs. Morely, the Princess, and lastly to Reizet. The Princess watched her out of the tail of her eye, as the two ladies passed on. "Monsieur Paul must not take naps," she said to Mrs. Morely with a dry smile, "when Mademoiselle is his wife. Ah! La! La! I was like her, and my husband took naps, and I——" a shrug, a lifted eyebrow, and the door closed, as though shutting from Mrs. Morely's mental vision a past too lurid for propriety. Then it opened, and the Princess' head emerged. "Not that now I am not a perfectly respectable woman," she said. "Alas! a waist of fifty centimetres necessitates virtue. *Bonne nuit.*"

Sylvia went on to her own room beyond her mother's, and Mrs. Bradish without ringing for Petan took off her famous strands of pearls, laid them on the dressing-table before the window, got into a comfortable wrapper, and went to have a chat with Sylvia. On the whole, Sylvia's behaviour that evening had been satisfactory, though her mother wondered what she and Reizet had found to say to each other during those few moments they had spent in the embrasured window before the Duke joined them.

During her own tête-à-tête with Mrs. Morely, the latter had done what she could to further Reizet's cause. His confession had touched her, and her respect and affection for him and her liking for Sylvia had incited her most adroit social acumen. She had gained no inkling of the impression on Mrs. Bradish, who had listened with a non-committal face, though evidently interested.

Mrs. Bradish ensconced herself before the fire and poked it skilfully to a blaze. The daintiness of her pale silk gown made her face seem old, shorn of its postiche, which now

TURTLES

hung on a silver candle-stick in her own room. Sylvia knelt before her to be unhooked behind, and Mrs. Bradish performed the office lingeringly, as though she loved it, though no caress was laid on the pretty neck before her. Sylvia looked up sideways smiling.

"The Princess gave me some sound advice on the train," she said, "on how to keep a husband's admiration. Hers was mad about her till he died."

"That was thirty years ago," sniffed Mrs. Bradish, "and we only have her word for it."

Sylvia moved about the room, placing photos, admiring the *boiserie* and at last braiding her hair in its usual long plat. "It was good, however," she said. "I mean to follow it."

"You might pass the advice along," said Mrs. Bradish, longing to ask whether Sylvia intended to allow the Duke to benefit.

Sylvia perched herself on her mother's chair arm, one hand idly ruffling the head beneath her hand. "Her rules appeal to me—some of them. First of all, I must never show any more intelligence to my husband than just sufficient to appreciate his own. I must never ask where he has been or what he has been doing: and I must never tell him where I have been or what I have been doing, unless it is that I've been to see his relations. I must flirt with him, at all times and under all circumstances, delicately and with skill, that he may not be sure whether it is sincere. A man must be kept guessing. And most important of all: never allow him in my dressing-room unless he is a philosopher, for a man forgives sin quicker than a skimpy flannel petticoat."

"As though any one but the Princess would wear one," sniffed Mrs. Bradish. "Am certain she wears tatting on her lingerie and stone-coloured stays."

"Perhaps now, but not—then," laughed Sylvia. "I must

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

learn his moods sufficiently well to know when he longs to argue, and then contradict everything he says. Also, to recognise the mood when I must agree with him, even when he says a woman I detest is better looking than I am. I must never expect ardour from him until after dinner, and then tolerate it but not return it. I must never tell him I love him for his virtues, for he will desire to be thought a wicked dog, if he's good; and if he is a wicked dog, he mustn't know I've found it out. If he admires a woman, I must make her my intimate friend, and ask her daily to luncheon with another, better-looking woman. It confuses his mind. It is wiser, the Princess says, to like your husband, but to love another. To love keeps a woman young, but warps judgment, and husbands need a lot of judgment on the part of their wives. A lover needs only—love."

"Scandalous!" said Mrs. Bradish.

"French," replied Sylvia, "which is the same thing. Now, Mother, dear, if I marry the Duke, not loving him, you may know what to expect. No one will mind, least of all the Duke, and in time,—I'll turn into a duplicate of the Princess."

Mrs. Bradish rose, replacing the poker with which she had been toying, into its corner with emphasis. "Don't talk nonsense," she said. "The Duke will know how to be both lover and husband. Ring for Petan like a good child. Don't forget to cold-cream your face. Country air roughens the skin."

Petan meanwhile had heard the bell and in a grey flannel wrapper and felt slippers had softly opened her door and was modestly creeping along the darkened hall toward her duties, when her attention was arrested by a curious sound of something scraping on the floor. The sound was faint and irregular, and appeared to come from near the Duke's chamber, the door of which was ajar. As she listened the

TURTLES

sound came toward her. She could see nothing, though a pale light lay on the oaken floor from the windows looking into the court. The sound was persistent and incisive, cutting the profound silence with teasing delicacy. Now it seemed only a few feet away, in front of her, close to the wainscoting, where shadows lay.

Petan stopped and listened. Yes. It was there, scraping toward her. She bent and put out her hand. It came in contact with a small, hard object which immediately became motionless and silent.

"One of those accursed turtles," thought Petan, and picked it up. Then was explained the mystery of that scraping sound. To one of its scaly paws clung a tiny bit of paper. Petan picked it off and held it to the light. It and the paw were both covered with some sticky substance smelling of oil and turpentine. Petan smelled and fingered it at a loss, then recognised it as putty—quite fresh and adhesive. With a disgusted grimace she put the turtle down and scraped her finger free of the sticky paper against the window ledge, and then hurried on to Mrs. Bradish's room. Just as she reached the door, a shrill scream rang out, resounding through that silent house. The door flew open, and Mrs. Bradish appeared on the threshold, ghastly, distraught, a cold draught from the open window behind her almost extinguishing the candles on her dressing-table.

"My pearls!" she cried. "Gone! Stolen!"

Sylvia and Petan flew from opposite directions, staring at the apparition in pink silk with its denuded head, then simultaneously ran to the dressing-table at which Mrs. Bradish pointed with a tragic gesture, but no pearls met their eyes. Only the reddish pompadour swaying in the wind on the candle-stick. Meanwhile feet were heard running and doors slamming in the house, and some one knocked at the door.

Petan opened it, and the Duke appeared on the threshold,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

blinking with alarm and sleep, in a rich dressing-gown of brocaded silk, from beneath which striped pajamas appeared above bare ankles.

"Mesdames. What is it? I heard a cry."

Mrs. Bradish whisked the pompadour out of sight and pointed to the dressing-table, while Sylvia explained, and others came running down the passage: Margot's nurse in her cotton nightdress; the Vicomte in canary brocaded robe, Reizet in his shirtsleeves, Mrs. Morely in a black satin kimono on which gilded storks disported themselves, and lastly the Princess, out of breath in a grey flannel petticoat with a bath towel about her shoulders. They crowded into the room with two or three servants, all talking at once. The Vicomte was apparently annoyed and incredulous, until Reizet suddenly called their attention to the window opening on the balcony. They all stared, open-mouthed, while Mrs. Bradish collapsed in a chair and burst into tears.

"Neatly done," said Reizet, pointing to the window, where a pane of glass near the handle had been cut out. Through the aperture the rascal's hand had opened the window for his entrance,—for the dressing-table stood directly before it. The Duke stepped out on the balcony and in a moment held up before them the pane of glass—cleanly cut. In the centre of the pane was a round smear of something sticky, and around it smeary fingerprints. The Duke rubbed these, smelling his fingers.

"Don't do that," cried the Vicomte angrily. "We might have traced him by the prints."

"How stupid of me," said the Duke. "But quick, Jehan. The miscreant can't be far away. Perhaps he's in the park still. Vicomte, we'll rouse the house and all the men on the place with your permission and give chase."

Reizet was peering over the stone balcony. "Wait," he

TURTLES

cried. "I see something on the ivy. Get me a light, and I'll climb down. The stems are strong."

They searched for wraps, appropriating Mrs. Bradish's and Sylvia's articles of raiment and the bed covers, and while the Duke held and shielded a candle, they leaned over the rail in the damp, cold air, while Reizet swung himself over and cautiously descended. A moment later, they heard him utter a soft exclamation, and then he went on down to where, on the soft earth below, by the aid of his alcohol cigarette lighter, he found marks of bare feet, running off toward the sunken garden to the left.

He called up to them. "You men, all come down. I'll meet you in the hall. Hurry and let me in."

The next moment the five women were left alone with the Vicomte, who, with his dressing gown wrapped about his bird-like ankles, assured them he remained to protect them. He threw logs on the fire, tossed a pair of pink satin stays from a comfortable chair, and prepared to make himself at home, ignoring the bizarre costumes of the ladies. Mrs. Bradish then proceeded to recount details.

One odd point was revealed: namely, that a diamond brooch which had lain near the necklace had not been touched, though an emerald of great value decorated its centre. The Vicomte explained this by the supposition that some sound had frightened the thief away, who had hastily decamped as he had come, and fled through the park. It was probable that Mrs. Bradish and her jewel case had been "spotted" when leaving her house in Paris, and been followed to the station and thence to the château. No doubt some pawn shop would receive the booty when the hue and cry had subsided, and the police were notified. When the men returned from their search, a telegram would be sent to the station for expedition at the earliest possible moment the next morning, notifying the police in all directions, but in these days of motor bandits, railroads

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

were little used for flight. During these cogitations, Petan had remained in the background, observing, weighing, judging. It now occurred to her that the thief might be concealed within, instead of dodging pursuers in the park, planning further depredation when all should be abed. Therefore, on her own account, she started on a voyage of discovery. She looked under the ponderous bed, behind curtains, in wardrobes, aware that her strong right arm was as effective as that of the average burglar's. Their three rooms were thoroughly searched, and then she went out on the balcony and peered over the rail into the park. In the distance she heard voices and glimpsed moving lights approaching the house. As she was about to step over the window sill to return to the room, she saw, leaning against the outer wall, the pane of glass which had been cut out. She picked it up and turned it to and fro to examine it. Its edges were clean cut, evidently by some sharp instrument, and its surface soiled. Suddenly she found her fingers sticky, and by the dim light from the open window, discovered them to be greasy as well. She held them to her nose and detected an odour of oil and turpentine. Where had she smelled that before? In a flash she recalled the turtle and that bit of paper adhering to its paw creeping along the corridor from the Duke's room. Petan gasped, and sat down suddenly on the railing in the darkness. Just then the object of her thoughts entered Mrs. Bradish's room, followed by Reizet. Both men still wore their overcoats and laid two revolvers among the silver accoutrements on the dressing-table. Petan remained where she was, her dazed thoughts gradually clarifying, and her eyes fixed on the Duke's distinguished face, pale from exertions. He took up a position on the hearthrug facing his small audience, with a discouraged shrug of his shoulders.

"Of course you didn't find him," said Mrs. Bradish irritably.

TURTLES

"Not a trace," replied Reizet, his eyes on Sylvia in her pale blue trailing negligée and long plat of hair, where she leaned on the back of her mother's chair. The Duke warmed his hands at the blaze, saying: "Now for a course of action. We must act sensibly and not hastily, though I for one feel sure those pearls will be recovered. They are too well known not to be traced and such thievery is invariably punished."

Petan, unobserved on the balcony, shivering in her grey flannel wrapper, remained motionless, eyes and ears alert.

"We must telegraph the first thing in the morning to Paris," said the Vicomte in a trembling voice. "Get Lepine on the rascal's trail."

"He's such a charming man," said the Princess. "I saw him marching down the Avenue Wagram among those rioters the First of May, and not one criminal dared touch the little man. Ah! It moved me, that courage, and I asked him to dinner."

"Did he come?" laughed Mrs. Morely.

"No. He wrote me he had to assist at the less agreeable ceremony of hanging a man——"

"Come! Come!" interrupted the Vicomte. "*Ma mie*, you'd coquette with Saint Peter. To business. The telegraph office will not be open until eight to-morrow morning, but we must decide what is best to be done."

Sylvia lightened the tension by saying, with a glance at Reizet, "What a pity we cannot send for Sherlock Holmes."

"We can," smiled Reizet. "He is on the third shelf downstairs in the library."

The Duke wagged one finger in negation. "Not at all. He is in Paris this moment, and I happen to know him. He is by no means—shelved." They all looked at Petrinac, who glanced smilingly from face to face, amused by their evident distaste for such flippancy at such a moment. Mrs. Bradish tapped her foot irritably on the parquet.

"For heaven's sake stop joking and——"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"But I am not joking, dear Madame," replied Petrinac imperturbably. "He really is in Paris: or rather the original of the character which Sir Conan Doyle so skilfully portrayed. His name is Doveen, though the Secret Service calls him the Spider, so ably does he spin his web about a criminal."

"A detective?" queried the princess.

"In a sense. He is often employed in affairs of State: quite a gentlemanly sort of person. His origin is a mystery, though; they say that he is the illegitimate son of a king and a peasant."

"How romantic," murmured the princess.

The Duke turned abruptly to his cousin. "You know all about him, Jehan. They say he prevented that last Polish insurrection. Did you ever see him?"

Reizet shook his head. "No. But of course I have heard of him. He is an able man, but would hardly interest himself in a pearl necklace."

The Duke shrugged his shoulders, searching his inner pocket for a cigarette, which, with consent from the ladies, he lit, while they sat in a momentary silence. Petan, on the balcony, wondered at his apparent indifference to prompt decision and was not surprised when Mrs. Bradish demanded querulously what was going to be done at eight in the morning with the telegraph office. "Surely," she added, speaking to both Reizet and his cousin, "you two men, with your influence, could persuade your Spider to at least give his opinion on the robbery. Personal interest counts a lot, and if he'd take the case, I would pay almost anything within reason. Couldn't you persuade him, Monsieur?" she pleaded, with eyes on Petrinac.

"Am entirely at your service," he replied, "but——" he hesitated, running his fingers down his beard to its point with a nervous gesture. "But why?" demanded Mrs. Bradish.

"It is too much of a responsibility. You see he always in-

TURTLES

sists on working alone. He claims that professional detectives care more for personal advertisement than anything else, and publicity is what he desires above all else to avoid."

"So do I," cried Mrs. Bradish. "I don't want headlines in the papers, for all the Apaches to read and dwell upon. Monsieur, I insist. Your Spider can refuse and it will only delay the affair an hour or two if he does. Come! There in pen and ink. Write the telegram and make it a personal favour."

Mrs. Bradish had risen and led the way to the desk and stood waiting, pen in hand, held toward the Duke, who reluctantly took it and sat down, while the others expressed their satisfaction with the idea. When he had blotted it, he returned to the hearthrug. "There it is," he said with reluctant gravity. "Remember, I do it under protest. Personally, I should prefer to employ the regular Service. However, he probably will not come. But if he does, as I said, he will not brook interference, and it would be better to have his identity unknown to the servants. Tell them the case is taken up in Paris, that Doveen may have free play here. And now we must leave the ladies to rest——"

But Reizet stepped forward into the circle of light from the candelabra, pulling something from his pocket. "Wait a moment," he said. "I found this stuck on the ivy during my descent. I don't know if it is of importance, but your Sherlock Holmes might deduce something from it." Reizet held forth a tiny bit of coloured cotton as they crowded around him. It was frayed, yet appeared bright and new, its vivid colouring quite unstained.

The Vicomte took it and turned it to and fro, puzzled, and then Sylvia took it.

"Why, it looks just like a negro's bandanna handkerchief!" she exclaimed. "It must have belonged to the thief, for it

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

is quite new." She held it out, but Mrs. Bradish drew back with a shudder.

"Horrid! Of course it did. Keep it, and——"

"Naturally," replied Reizet, putting it back in his inner pocket. "It helps explain the print of naked feet under the balcony."

"A ruffian!" cried the Princess. "Ah! here is hot punch. The dear Vicomte is thoughtful. Let us drink to the ruffian's speedy undoing, though I hope he is not young and good-looking."

Mrs. Bradish turned to Sylvia. "Where is Petan?" she asked. "She ought to have some."

Petan heard, and swiftly sped along the balcony to her own room.

A moment later, when Sylvia rapped at her door, she heard only a stentorian snore from within, and wondered at Petan's indifference to such exciting events. When the girl returned to her mother's room, she found the oddly attired party standing about the steaming bowl, while the Duke held his glass aloft.

"Here is to crime detected and punished," he said cheerily.

CHAPTER XIV: THE SPIDER

THE following morning seemed long to each member of the party. Mrs. Morely spent it in her room. Reizet, with a groom, rode across the country to the château where the Minister of War lay, still unconscious, but improving. Mrs. Bradish wrote twenty-one notes on the Vicomte's best note-paper, ostensibly to assure her friends of her safety, but in reality to show them how smartly she was quartered. Postal-card pictures accompanied each epistle to prove the splendour of her present habitation. She said nothing of turtles, draughts, or the absence of a bathroom.

Sylvia wandered over the park, for the sun was shining, an astonishing phenomenon, which lightened her spirits. The forest's mysterious glades and dim aisles seemed redolent of peace after Parisian turmoil, and she envied an existence which the Vicomte might, but omitted to, enjoy. This home, fastidiously removed from modern associations, seemed to the girl more truly French than the Étoile, and she had an odd sensation that here she was at home, in a deeper sense than she had been since her father had died.

Jack had told her much of their own château in Normandy, surrounded by its tranquil moat, where lily pads flecked the reflection of ivied walls and ancient *tourelles*. In her imagination she could see the two aunts in that fine setting, and Reizet also, engaged in homely duties among his villagers, entertaining old friends with that simplicity which is born of real hospitality and not ostentation. Sylvia was envious of all that imagined dignity and beauty which she could never

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

share. Jack might tell her of it, but she would never get nearer than his pictured fancy painted it. Alas! that her tastes and desires were for such things when only purchased luxuries were attainable.

According to Mrs. Bradish's commands, the Duke's telegram had been sent to Monsieur Doveen in Paris, and every one was relieved, and surprised to receive, two hours later, his reply that he would arrive that afternoon by the three o'clock train.

At five every one was congregated in the hall before the fire. Sylvia had insisted on having tea served according to Anglo-Saxon methods, and considerable confusion had resulted. A table had, after sundry and minute directions, been properly arranged by a bewildered butler, while the Vicomte twittered and fluttered, all anxiety to please. When the tea was finally brought, however, it proved to be undrinkable, and the chagrined butler had wrung his hands and called Heaven and all the saints to witness that the cook could do no better. Mademoiselle had demanded that the water should be boiled. He was prepared to swear on the soul of his grandmother that it had been boiled half an hour—and the tea within it. . . . Could any chef do more? Behold! Was it not black, and so beautifully bitter as to wither the tongue?

However, after fresh explanations, other tea was brought, and even the Vicomte had relaxed under its charm, when the sound of approaching wheels was heard, and a few moments later the longed-for Monsieur Doveen was ushered into the circle.

Sylvia, who had remained in the background while introductions took place, was surprised by two things: one, that the new-comer apparently had almost forgotten the Duke, and for a moment failed to place his identity among the three men. The second surprise was the fact that Petan, who stood in the background, apparently had seen him before, for a gleam of

THE SPIDER

recognition flashed from her eyes, gone almost too quickly to note.

In truth Petan had recognised Monsieur Doveen partially, but could neither place him nor convince herself that she had indeed seen him before. So occupied was she with this teasing familiarity of some memory that she hardly heard the presentations made, or the detailed account of the previous night's vicissitudes. All the while, her brain was tormented with the problem of when and where she had seen that remarkable head and face before. Suddenly Monsieur Doveen rose to pass Sylvia cream for her tea, and for an instant his profile was in direct line with that of the Duke, outlined against the sombre wainscoting of the hall. Just so had she seen those two heads in the dim shabbiness of a dingy café in Paris. For an instant Petan stared from one to the other, while an unreasoning fear rose in her heart, bewildering thought, chilling her body with an odd sense of baffled helplessness.

Doveen was talking in a grave, controlled voice, entirely self-possessed, and with the dignity of a man accustomed to good society. His keen face was intellectual, but shadowed by melancholy, and he spoke without gesticulation in perfect French. His tall, lean body was garmented with sober taste, and his personality bespoke reserve force and a certain arrogance. But Petan now remembered every line of that inscrutable face and spare frame. The same heavy lids veiled the sombre eyes; the same straight dark hair lay smoothly against the finely domed head. Yet the Duke, who had known him more or less intimately in Berlin, had greeted him as though many years had lapsed since they had met, and Doveen apparently had found difficulty in recognising the Duke at all. Why? There was a reason. What was it? They had acted a lie. Only a few days before she had seen them talking intimately, absorbed with papers which the Duke was explaining; yet now they greeted one another with the formal

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

restraint of a slight acquaintance renewed after a long interval. Petan seated herself in a distant corner, took out her knitting from her black satin bag, and proceeded to listen with all her powers, and to watch with both her dragon's eyes. "And now, Monsieur," Mrs. Bradish was saying, "what can we do to assist you? You have all the facts: do you find any clue?"

Monsieur Doveen put down his cup with deliberation and crossed one leg over the other. Sylvia noticed the admirable shape of his hands and their strength and delicacy. In speaking, he addressed himself principally to Reizet, as though acknowledging the latter's superior personality.

"It seems a simple robbery," he said in his measured intonation, "but its very simplicity may prove to be the difficulty. It is evident, of course, that the thief climbed to the balcony, cut the glass and descended with his booty, but it is not equally sure that he remained below. This château is immense, and a man could easily hide within it for hours, if not days. He might even be in it now somewhere in the maze of rooms and cellars. He would know, naturally, that chase would at once be given across the park, as it was, and had he fled there, the chances are that you would have caught him, for the park is walled in its wooded sections."

"That sounds logical," replied Reizet. "We have been dull. He probably remained snug and warm till we were all asleep and then got away comfortably."

"But if he did, why didn't he take something else while he was about it?" queried Mrs. Morely. "He could have done so easily, for we were off guard."

"He had a fortune in his pocket," replied Doveen. "The fact that he left a valuable brooch behind proves that his nerves were not steady, and he took no risks. I fancy he was unarmed, and more in need than courageous."

THE SPIDER

"Just a common ruffian," said the Princess. "Probably hungry."

Reizet leaned forward, holding out the torn bit of gaily coloured calico he had found stuck on the ivy. "Madame is right, for this was part of his costume."

Doveen took the bit of cotton and turned it to and fro in his lean fingers, without speaking. Then he drew a pocket microscope forth, and examined it minutely, absorbed.

"You have a clue there?" asked the Duke.

"Several," replied Doveen.

"So soon?" exclaimed the Vicomte. "You move faster than my turtles, having been here but half an hour."

Doveen smiled wryly, "but I have been here two hours, Monsieur; I came unheralded by an earlier train, that I might look well over the ground before any one knew me to be here, either in your threshold or in the village. Then I returned to the station to be—met, and arrive properly. The wing where the robbery occurred is far from the servants' quarters and I went well over the ground unobserved."

"You clever creature," cried the Princess. "What a minister you would have made for Louis Quatorze. Do tell us what you have deduced, for Monsieur de Petrinac tells us you work on Sherlock Holmes' methods."

Doveen looked annoyed. "I work on my own methods, Madame, and stand or fall by results. But I will gladly tell you all I surmise. May I light a cigarette?" They all sat in impatient silence while Doveen deliberately rolled and lit a cigarette from a pouch of tobacco he unearthed from his pocket, Sylvia again admiring the deftness of his fingers which allowed no particle of weed to escape then. As they watched a ring of smoke float upward, they listened to his slow words: "The thief is a Sicilian, who has been in England for many months. He is of medium height, light weight,

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

and has been a sailor. He is an habitual thief and a glazier during the day."

"It sounds exactly like Sherlock Holmes," said Sylvia as he paused.

"The saints defend us!" cried the Princess. "You'll be telling how old I am——"

Doveen smiled. "Madame has eternal youth," he replied. "Have no fear, for the mystery is simple enough of solution. In the first place, this bit of cotton which Monsieur de Reizet found on the ivy is part of a neckerchief manufactured on a hand-loom in Sicily. Those looms are relics of Sicily's occupation by the Greeks centuries ago. They printed their cloths with wooden blocks, each rolled in colour and then set together in forms, as was this. So undoubtedly he was a Sicilian. He wore hobnail shoes, whose prints were on the lawn, therefore he had been in France sufficiently long to have worn out his own, for Italian sabots have merely wooden heels, whereas these had nails in them. He had been a sailor, because he jumped outward and backward four feet, a trick learned in the Italian Navy, where he also learned the wisdom of climbing with bare feet. As to his height and weight: the torn ivy betrays the former, and the impression made on the ground when he jumped, the latter."

"How easy it is when you know how!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradish. "I feel as though we had him by the collar already."

"But he had no collar, Madame," replied Doveen, "because he wore a neckerchief. And he wore no socks as well, because when he removed his sabots his prints were those of bare feet. He had caution and self-control, because there isn't a chip in the glass, which he removed and set aside with perfect care. He is a glazier, because, though a poor man, he cut the glass with a diamond, and moistened the putty with oil to make it stick, for the handle by which he

THE SPIDER

removed the pane from the window, a method usual with glaziers."

The Princess laughed. "You contradict the adage: 'Set a thief to catch a thief.'"

"You know too much for an honest man," said the Vicomte. "You should hold office in our Republic."

Sylvia leaned forward. "It sounds exactly like Sherlock Holmes. I don't see how you can enter into a criminal's mind so cleverly. They can't think along the same lines as we do."

Doveen looked at her for the first time with attention, and Sylvia had the impression that those melancholy eyes looked her through with lightning rapidity, as though he was, in some way, familiar with her personality and interested in it.

"The human mind, Mademoiselle," he replied, "invariably thinks along one line in common—that of self-preservation—and to detect the cause of injury and hunt down the transgressor is possible and natural to all, and only needs practice and habit to perfect itself. But pardon me, we waste time, do we not? I should like to see the house and rooms, with our host's permission."

"With pleasure," replied the Vicomte, rising. "Shall I go with you?"

"No, thanks," replied Doveen. "I should like to go about as quietly as possible on account of the servants, for there is no proof that they are not implicated. I take it for granted that no one has told them in what capacity I am here."

"Not a soul knows," replied the Vicomte. "They think you a guest—as you are."

"Thank you," replied Doveen. He rose, bowed separately to the four ladies, and left the room.

The party separated to rest for dinner, the Princess expressing regret that she had not brought a smarter dinner gown, as Monsieur Doveen was certainly a gentleman of

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

charm and distinction. Sylvia was left alone in the hall, for even Petan had disappeared, so she curled herself up in a deep chair before the fire, anticipating a quiet hour. But suddenly she was aware of another's presence, and, looking up, found the Duke looking down upon her with a smile.

"Cosy, this," said he.

"Spooky," replied Sylvia, sitting erect and smoothing her draperies.

The Duke seated himself on the other side of the hearth, tired eyes on the flames.

"Our language is so inadequate," he said. "We have no word which expresses the meaning of your home."

"Neither have you 'homes,'" said Sylvia. "Your furnishings always look as though they longed to be introduced to each other. I can't imagine children playing duels or brigands in your splendid rooms."

The Duke sighed, and at his next words Sylvia reproached her own stupidity for having given him an opening.

"That is just it. That house of mine in Paris isn't a home. It needs a woman to make it one. Margot's room is the only livable room in it; a delightful confusion of non-sensical rubbish. As for the rest, since I have seen your home, filled with evidences of intimate affections, I find my great rooms as agreeable to live in as the Gallery of Sculptures at the Louvre."

"But surely your hosts of friends——" murmured Sylvia.

"I have no friends. A diplomat is trained to avoid making them. It is safer to live alone, than on top of dynamite in pleasant company."

"Then to be diplomatic is to be artificial?"

"There is such a thing as genuine artificiality."

"How you play with words to conceal your real thoughts," said Sylvia, wondering what lay behind his words.

The Duke smiled at her through narrowed lids. "Isn't po-

THE SPIDER

lite conversation the art of exchanging opinions of no value on subjects of no interest?"

"It may be polite," laughed Sylvia, "but it makes society as dull as an egg without salt. I often feel in your French society like voicing something so real, so honest, so straight from the shoulder that it will shatter all their little politenesses to bits."

"A pretty woman might, but a gentleman——"

"What is a gentleman?" demanded Sylvia.

The Duke rose, facing her, on the hearth, doubtless conscious of his capacity to present at least the outward semblance of the rare being she asked him to define. His hand drew his beard to its point gracefully for a moment in silence, finding words difficult to gather for proper meaning.

"A gentleman," he said at last slowly, "is a subtlety of distinctions too fine for analysis. Can you define a perfume—an effect of harmony?"

"Abraham Lincoln——" began Sylvia.

"Was not a gentleman," interrupted the Duke. "A man, yes, which is something, but could he have entered a salon with grace or smiled on the guillotine?"

Sylvia was on her feet, face aglow, the light of battle awake in her eyes. She faced the Duke, and he instinctively drew back.

"Lincoln," said Sylvia clearly, "entered people's hearts with grace, and had the courage to face not the guillotine, but the verdict of history. If courage, honour, self-abnegation, gentleness, and strength go to make gentlemen, then was Lincoln one, and had the kings of France been like him, France might not be a Republic to-day."

The Duke suddenly felt something within him shrivel away from the girl's clear eyes. He hated her, yet longed to snatch her to his breast. Her code mocked his sophistries, and for an appalling instant he saw himself as he was, stripped of com-

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

placency, and the spectacle was not agreeable. Her indomitable belief in honour being above mannerisms, courage being founded on acts and not words, was audacious in its wholeheartedness, and he suddenly foresaw a future in which, as his wife, she would need disciplining. He would never tolerate her rigidity of standards. They were absurd, and she would have much to learn from him and his world. He shrugged his shoulders, with attempted nonchalance, though Sylvia saw the anger behind his smile. He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"There speaks a pure soul, Mademoiselle, to which I do homage. Your Lincoln was a great man, and we should certainly forget his crudities when contemplating his virtues. But I still believe that greatness of soul may be covered by a well-cut coat, and that good taste in externals expresses the highest exponent of fine thinking."

Sylvia smiled at him strangely, amusedly; and the Duke wondered whether she suspected his wrath and future intentions, and whether her incisive glance discovered his sordidness and chicanery. But Sylvia tilted her bright head on one side gaily.

"Reincarnation will solve the problem," she laughed. "Some day we'll have a composite of Louis le Soleil, Buddha, Lincoln, and Mrs. Pankhurst to run a government, and then shall the Golden Age begin. Meanwhile we must totter along, carrying our imperfections and suffering from the results. Heigho! Dreadful world, isn't it?" She moved toward the door, smiling at him over her shoulder. "I'm off for a nap before dinner——"

"A moment, Mademoiselle!" cried the Duke.

"No! At least for an hour," replied Sylvia, frankly "yawning." "Our wits will have to be awake for Monsieur Doveen's revelations. Au revoir."

THE SPIDER

The curtains fell behind her, and also all symptoms of fatigue as, half way up the stair, Reizet overtook her.

"Wait," he said in a low voice. "Can't you give me half an hour? Come to the library. I haven't seen you all day, and I did work so hard to get you here—indirectly."

Sylvia longed to accede to this simple request, but with the Duke prowling about, thinking her upstairs recovering from exhaustion, it would never do. She glanced down on his face a few steps below, smiling.

"You would shock this French household by a tête-à-tête? They aren't used to American fashions."

"You introduced an innovation in tea here," said Reizet. "Why not an innovation in social intercourse?" Reizet paused, studying Sylvia's face. "What is it, Mademoiselle? Something is troubling you. Tell me."

Sylvia looked away, then back again to the man's face, an instant before happily eager, now grave. In truth, she was troubled, though by what she hardly knew. An indefinable uneasiness had been born within the hour. She remembered the packet which Reizet carried, and she feared for him, she knew not why. With Doveen's advent things had occurred which raised suspicions of the sincerity regarding the situation; vague, hardly formed, but Reizet's future, perhaps the future of France, hung on that packet, and if pearls could be stolen—— Yet, what could she say without betraying a personal interest which maiden modesty forbade? Sylvia folded both hands on the rail and looked down at Reizet gravely. A new womanliness breathed from her earnest face from which raillery had fled. If what she was about to say betrayed that which should be concealed, she no longer cared. It was not the moment for egotisms, and he seemed so unconscious of danger.

"Monsieur," she said, "I am troubled for you. Men treat woman's intuitions lightly sometimes, but who knows what

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

unrecognised voice speaks through them? I am afraid of Monsieur Doveen, of the situation here. Why, I can not tell you, for I hardly know myself. But when he came I felt danger came with him. No, don't laugh. Who is he? Why did he come here for so small a matter as a pearl necklace when his time is crowded with graver affairs? Yet he came on a telegram sent by your cousin, all the way from Paris."

Reizet smiled, though, now that he thought of it, Doveen's promptness did seem extraordinarily obliging.

"It was good of him, certainly," he replied, "but he did it because of his friendship for Paul."

Sylvia leaned forward, her face alight and eager. "But you heard Monsieur de Petrinac say that he had not seen him for years—since they met on business of State in Berlin. How long ago was that?"

"Really, Mademoiselle," said Reizet vaguely, "let me think. I think it was six—no, seven years ago."

"And was their intimacy so close that a telegram from your cousin seven years later should bring Monsieur Doveen here, on the track of a common criminal? And—and I know he isn't French, in spite of his perfect speech."

Reizet looked grave. "What you say is very disturbing, Mademoiselle, but, after all, I feel that your intuitions are at fault. The robbery was certainly committed, and Doveen was in Paris, probably idle for the moment. Besides, how do you know he is not French? What nationality do you think he belongs to? Paul said no one knew."

Sylvia shook her head wisely. "I can't swear as to HIS nationality, but his coat and boots are—German. No other nation could turn out anything so altogether dreadful."

Reizet threw back his head with a laugh. "Oh! woman! woman! To what are we not subjected in thy scale of approbation? However, Mademoiselle, I am not ungrateful, and to ease your fears, I may tell you that I never go out alone,

THE SPIDER

and sleep with my door locked and a revolver under my pillow. Tell me—are you afraid—for me?” Reizet was not but one step below Sylvia’s bending face. Reizet smiled up into her eyes. “You are troubled—for me,” he said audaciously, his eyes dark with feeling, though his lips smiled. “No, you can’t deny it, and that I cherish. To-day, I can’t tell you all my thanks, but when that Minister of War’s troubles are over, mine will be, and then—and then—my gratitude——”

But Sylvia was half way up the stair, and from there shook her finger at Reizet.

“How illogical is man,” she laughed. “One minute you tell me there is nothing for which to be grateful, and insinuate that I am a foolish, suspicious person; and the next you promise me gratitude for what you denied exists. However, if you’re found murdered in your bed, I’ll say, ‘I told you so.’”

Reizet ran up the intervening steps and seized her hand. His head bent above it: she felt his lips pressed close—once, twice, thrice on her palm. “*Mademoiselle—chérie.*” His voice was indistinct, but his eyes spoke. Then, with a gesture of impatient self-restraint, he turned and ran swiftly down the stairs. At the bottom he looked up. “*A bientôt,*” he called softly. “*A bientôt.*”

An hour later Reizet was in his room writing letters. He had left the door open, and was interrupted by a soft tap. He looked up and saw Doveen standing on the threshold, self-possessed and erect. “May I come in?” he asked, and entered without waiting for response. Reizet rose courteously, for something in his visitor’s personality exacted respect.

Doveen did not take the seat proffered, but perched himself, after a moment’s desultory wandering about the room, on the window ledge of the open window, where his saturnine profile showed clear-cut against the sky.

His shadow darkened the room within. Reizet offered

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

him a cigar, which he lit, but a moment later forgot, and while he talked he played with it idly.

"How are you getting on?" asked Reizet after banalities were exchanged. "Any further clues?"

Doveen smiled. "I can't give away professional secrets, but I have been thoroughly over house and grounds, with satisfactory results. Don't think, however, that I am here to ransack your room. Only dropped in for a chat, because the country depresses me. This château is enormous. Its rows of silent rooms are like prison cells. Monsieur, have you ever been in a prison?"

The abrupt question startled Reizet.

"No," he replied. "Have you?"

Doveen tapped the end of his unlit cigar on the stone ledge with a ruminating expression for a moment, then looked up.

"Yes," he said curtly. "More than once. Business—took me there. A prison is not the place to breed the softer virtues. There are times when the part I play in sending my fellow-beings there is not to my taste: my imagination remains with them there, shut in with their helplessness and rage; and doubtless some are—innocent."

Reizet crossed to a table and lit a cigarette, and while lighting it was aware that his guest's inscrutable eyes studied him.

"Don't you find your profession unpleasant in some respects?" he asked. "Coming into contact with criminals——"

"They're not very different from other people," Doveen replied. "There is no one, Monsieur, who is not capable of crime under sufficient provocation. No, do not look indignant. I speak from experience. Sometimes crime is the outcome of a noble motive. The end to be attained necessitates breaking of a law. 'The end justifies the means,' is the axiom of the greatest religious organisation in the world."

Reizet smiled. "Expediency covers a multitude of sins, I know, but——"

THE SPIDER

Doveen turned. "You remember Jean Valjean? Surely his crime was not the result of 'expediency.' There are men who break no law until the Law breaks them. May I tell you a—story?"

"Willingly," replied Reizet, pushing a chair toward his guest. "Be comfortable meanwhile."

Doveen took the chair, pushed his hands deep into his trousers' pockets and stretched out his legs. For a moment he stared before him, as though from the darkening shadows of the room he evoked memories which gripped his imagination. When he spoke his voice was low and quiet, but behind it emotion made itself felt, held in leash.

"Years ago, there was a decent chap, nameless, yet well born, who had more pride, ambition, and self-respect than was consistent with his condition. He found himself at the age of twenty-three in Alaska, digging for gold, with a pal, a sort of outcast, like himself. One night, returning to camp from the distant settlement, he got lost in the snow, and when finally he reached their tent he found his pal had been murdered, and his savings taken. My—er—friend was arrested, tried and convicted. They sentenced him to twenty years' imprisonment in the local prison—innocent of any crime."

"Shocking!" exclaimed De Reizet. "But surely he had redress——"

"What could an outcast do in those wilds, where even Justice seeks gold? No! They shut him up in their ridiculous little jail, where he lived like a trapped animal for six years, with only the wind whistling against his barred windows for company. Can't you imagine what hatred and bitterness ate into his soul while he lay shivering on his wooden plank, with the snow drifting higher and higher about his prison walls, inexorably burying him alive?"

"Horrible!" breathed Reizet.

"Of course, the inevitable happened. One night he killed

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

his keeper with his strong, young hands, innocent until then of any crime, and found himself free—in a world of trackless snow. For weeks he hunted and was hunted, until he reached civilisation, and to-day he lives a respectable member of the Society he sinned against."

"Does he enjoy his liberty?" asked Reizet.

"His liberty is farcical. At any moment the Law may drag him back to unforgotten horrors."

"Poor man!"

Doveen turned a pair of satirical eyes upon Reizet. "You pity him. It is easy to pity those who wrong others. The keeper's wife would not pity him." His eyes looked about the fine old room and out where stars serenely appeared between drifting clouds. His face brooded, melancholy and sombre in the twilight. "Doubtless in some such home as this, founded on honour and tradition, where peace and dignity shelter happy lives, he remembers those frozen plains and feels again the silence of prison walls close in upon him."

There was a moment's silence. Then Reizet asked: "But are you not in the eyes of the Law an accessory to crime in leaving him at liberty, knowing these facts?"

Doveen turned and regarded Reizet a moment without speaking, then asked quietly: "Would you give him up, knowing these facts?"

"Heaven forbid!" cried Reizet. "Our system is often cruel and unjust. Sinners, if they be sinners, can no more be made innocent by torture than crooked backs can be straightened by blows. No! I should like to have justice tempered with mercy, and leave punishment to God."

Doveen nodded. "So say I. We should remember that happiness doesn't breed crime. If I ever come in contact with the man I spoke of, I shall tell him that there is another besides myself who does not resent his precarious liberty. I am called the 'Spider,' Monsieur, and perhaps you will not be-

THE SPIDER

lieve me when I tell you that the webs I spin enmesh within them my regrets and even sometimes remorse; but I look upon my profession conscientiously, and never allow personal feeling to tamper with duty or sympathy. We are links in a chain, and no one link has the right to loosen itself from the whole, else the chain becomes a menace instead of protection to the general good. Is there a brain which always preserves balance, or an individual's reason which is infallible? No! Therefore, the aggregate must rule, and I long ago learned not to arrogate to myself any right save that of usefulness."

"Usefulness," repeated Reizet. "To whom are you useful in the main?"

Doveen smiled. "You'll be sceptical when I tell you. Not to the State, though certain Mighty Ones thank me for certain results, but to—children. Yes, they are a hobby of mine—little shavers who pick up vices with their meals, out of the gutter. Environment is nine-tenths of the game, and I give every penny I can beg, borrow, or steal to that end. Give them a chance at soap and water, oxygen and congenial labour, and crime won't have a crack to crawl through."

Doveen rose and stood looking out across the park where deer wandered through peaceful glades and wide spaces, and mist-swathed tree-trunks. Then he moved toward the door, Reizet following. On the threshold he tapped Reizet lightly on the chest with sinewy fingers, so that the packet in Reizet's inner pocket rattled beneath the touch.

"You and I," Doveen said smilingly, "are what we are through no fault or virtue of our own. It would bore you and me to be criminals, eh? I find it more agreeable to hunt than to be hunted. But I must be off. I promised to see Madame Bradish before dinner, but will tell her that I prefer to wait until we are all together to talk, as I have little to

'A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

impart until I get to Paris. But I can say that, without doubt, she will recover her stolen property."

Doveen was in the passage, but Reizet laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"When? How? Where?" he cried impulsively. But his visitor was already gone, shrugging his shoulders. Reizet watched him as he went, wondering, and returned to his room.

Meanwhile Sylvia had gone to her room and rung for Petan. That lady came with alacrity, though she had pleaded a headache and remained invisible most of the day. She found her charge curled up on a lounge in the twilight, unusually still and silent. Petan moved about the room, lighting candles and pulling curtains together, shutting out rain-wet window-panes, and all the while there seemed to be a pall of reticence in the room.

"Come, talk to me, my Petan," said Sylvia at last. "Here in this chair, close to me, for I don't want Mother to hear. But I have got to tell some one or die of combustion."

Petan did as she was bidden, smoothing the silken coverlid while Sylvia told of what she had noticed that afternoon between Doveen and the Duke, of her vague uneasiness and suspicions, to all of which Petan listened in silence. Sylvia had expected and rather hoped for surprise and ridicule, but receiving sign of neither she demanded: "What think you of it, Petan? Do say something!"

"What am I?" asked the older woman, "to have opinions on such matters? You tell me to say something, *chérie*, and I speak, but to say what I think—ah! that is another matter."

"What do you think, Petan?"

"I will tell thee in another twenty-four hours, and not before," said Petan, rising. "This is an admirable opportunity to prove that a woman can hold her tongue. But leave

THE SPIDER

matters to me, my dove. If the devil be a member of this house party, it will be thy Petan who will discover him."

That evening after Petan had seen her two ladies descend, admirably coiffed and gowned for dinner, she retired to her own room, rang for a servant, and announced herself too ill of a migraine to descend for dinner, and asked that some coffee be brought to her room. Of this beverage she drank three large cups, of a strength to keep an owl wide-awake, then partially disrobed and lay down on her bed.

From the next room she could hear hilarious preparations attendant upon Margot's disrobing, and later, gurgles mingled with splashing of water, which filled her with fresh disapprobation of the English nurse whose one ambition seemed to be that of scrubbing. But at last all was quiet, and Petan heard the nurse's solid tread down the passage as she went to dinner. Petan had refrained from worrying Sylvia by mentioning the peregrinations of the turtle, or her suspicions regarding its curious footgear, and the similarity of its odour with that of the window-pane, but she had docketed it with Sylvia's information.

She now intended to institute researches on her own account, and after a moment rose and went into Margot's room, where firelight still danced an accompaniment to Margot's crooning. Even should the nurse return, Margot's needs were sufficient excuse for her own presence there, and, as every one was dining below, she had a full hour at her disposal.

But Margot had no intention of going to sleep. She found this novel figure by the fire interesting. It might be cajoled into all manner of unaccustomed delights, so she stood up in her crib and, emitting an engaging gurgle of laughter, awaited events. Petan looked up. Margot beckoned. Petan hesitated, and was lost.

"Take me," cooed Margot. She put one dimpled leg over

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

the crib's rail and held out her arms. Petan lifted her out and carried her to the fire. "Now we won't ever go to bed," said Margot. "Nurse was not nice to-night, desiring her repast more than me, and *mon père* also; even he was too busy to play with me." A deep sigh concluded the words.

Petan cuddled both feet into one of her hands. "What was thy father busy about?" she queried.

"I know not, for he closed the door, but I peeped through the keyhole, thinking he might be at his prayers, but he was not. I found out that he is like me, in that he also likes taking things to pieces and putting them together again."

"What did he take to pieces and put together again, my apple?" asked Petan, now attentive.

"His scarf-pin. He knew it was naughty, for did he not close the door, and even lock it? But I, like the *bon Dieu*, see all things. I saw him take the shiny stone and put it in his scarf-pin with his nail-file. Now, tell not. Promise me." She peered into Petan's perturbed face for assurance.

"I tell? *Jamais de le vie*," said Petan with such decision that Margot was completely comforted. But Petan decided that she must see that scarf-pin, and the sooner the better. "Had he used that diamond to cut the glass?" she wondered.

"And he did not come to thee to kiss thee before going to his dinner?"

"No. He played there, without inviting me. And it was a long time, for the servant came to tell him dinner was waiting, and found him not."

"But where was thy father then, my pigeon?" asked Petan gently.

"Taking the air without. Jehan has taught him those English habits. He minds not bathing and——"

"But where was he taking the air for the good of his health?" asked Petan.

"But without, on the balcony with the tall man," said

THE SPIDER

Margot. "When he returned he thought me asleep, and talked softly, without shoes, that I might not be awakened. That was why he did not come to salute me good night. Therefore, I forgive him."

Petan lifted her sweet burden and carried it to the crib. Two arms clung to her neck and soft lips caressed her cheek, while beguiling words coaxed at her ear, but once between the covers, Margot accepted defeat. "*Bon nuit—je t'aime,*" uttered a sleepy voice as Petan turned away. She returned to the fire and there remained motionless, willing the child to sleep with all her powers, for she intended to enter the Duke's room, and could not until those curious eyes which, like the bon Dieu, saw all things were closed.

The room was very still. Dying embers fell with soft abruptness, and the wind stirred the curtains at the open window. A full hour remained before the nurse would return, but Petan's impatience mounted as she listened to Margot's breathing become slower and deeper. At last she crept to the crib, and, convinced that sleep had come, took up the candle and box of matches and softly opened the door into the next room. There, having closed the door and locked it, she lit the candle and looked about.

The room was in perfect order. First, Petan went to the closet and looked thoroughly through each pocket of the clothes hanging therein, but discovered nothing. Then to the chest drawers and a trunk, both open, and then on to the dressing table, where were ranged tortoise-shell brushes, each surmounted by a ducal coronet.

On either side of the dressing table were three little drawers, and these Petan also investigated. The first two proved uninteresting, but the third caused her to draw a quick breath. Beneath some handkerchiefs lay an innocent-looking scarf-pin. She had seen it repeatedly in the Duke's neckties, but not as it was now. Then it held a diamond of considerable

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

size. Now these golden claws were bent and empty, and two were bent back as though forced inward ineffectively to hold the stone.

Petan stood looking at it, turning it to and fro, then quickly ran her hand beneath the handkerchiefs, searching in the corners of the drawer. Far back, under the white paper with which the drawer was lined, she felt a small object and, deftly scraping the paper back, brought forth a diamond. She took it and the pin to the candle and fitted the stone between the claws. It fell into place easily, and Petan's tongue clicked against her teeth with a significant sound.

Diamonds are used by every intelligent craftsman for cutting glass, as Petan knew. She recalled the round smear in the centre of the window-pane, and its similarity in touch and odour to the putty on the turtle's paw as it toddled from the Duke's room. A ball of putty adhering to the centre of a pane of glass makes an admirable handle by which to remove it after having been cut out.

"Oh, noble Duke!" breathed Petan as she replaced both diamond and pin. Then she looked about the room and espied in a distant corner a satchel, respectable in colour and sober in form, pasted over with labels of first-class Continental hotels. Everything else in the room had been left unlocked, as though crying to be investigated. Would this prove to be so?

Petan knelt before it. No, this was locked. Petan shook and wrenched it, but it resisted her efforts. How she longed for psychic force to see through that alligator covering. She was convinced that Mrs. Bradish's pearls were within.

Petan crouched back on her haunches, thinking hard. Why had the Duke taken them? He was not in dire need of cash sufficiently to rob, nor did Petan believe in the possibility of his falling to such depths of perfidy as to rob his future mother-in-law. Why this? Were they just "borrowed," and

THE SPIDER

for what reason? Then, in a flash, she had it. It had been the Duke who had brought forward Doveen as a possible detective, and it had been the Duke who had finally been the means of the former's advent upon the scene. Why? What had Doveen to do with the pearls? Why this farce, played with such prearranged skill?

Petan blew out the candle, and returned to her room. Sitting down on the edge of the bed in the darkness, she bent all her mind upon a problem which baffled and perplexed. She was convinced that serious matters were afoot, and that she, single-handed, must frustrate some intended crime. She remembered the packet in Reizet's keeping, and that interview in the café.

The Duke had frankly said that his Spider was spinner of State webs. The packet was destined for the Minister of War. Doveen, Sylvia had declared, wore German boots. Was there treachery afoot against the interests of France? Doveen and the Duke were plainly confederates in some game, and Reizet the intended victim. Yet what evidence had she to go on, save her suspicions of a turtle and a scarf-pin? The Duke was on affectionate terms with his cousin, and were she to go to him with her story she not only would be laughed to scorn, but would risk giving unpardonable offence. It would mean perhaps a future without Sylvia, and at such a prospect she recoiled.

She was also aware of the stringency of French law concerning accusation without proof. Circumstantial evidence counted but little, and to even insinuate dishonesty against a thieving servant was more liable to land the accuser in jail than the thief. And what hope had she, the humble Petan, against one of the greatest nobles in France? He would crush her as he did that finch, and leave her in the dust. No, she must play the game alone as far as mortal aid went, but it would do no harm to invoke the heavenly powers.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Petan crossed the room and knelt on the parquet before an image of the Virgin, and in eloquent French implored her aid in running the guilty to earth.

Then, as a further precaution, she unearthed a tiny, leaden image of St. Joseph from her box of trinkets and stood him on his head against her pin-cushion; for, as every one knows, his saintship will aid discovery of lost articles in the hope of being reinstated right side up.

Petan looked at her watch. It was nine, and dinner must be over. She opened the door and crept down the passage to where the gallery opened upon the great double staircase leading to the main hall. This was empty, but through the portières she glimpsed the Vicomte and the Duke in the centre of the salon, Sylvia opposite them, playing bridge, the Princess at the latter's elbow, smoking, all seemingly absorbed in the game. By the fire sat Mrs. Bradish and Reizet. Both, to Petan's astonishment, seemed to be on the friendliest terms, and Mrs. Morely glanced at them now and then with the satisfied air of one who has not been idle. At a desk near by Doveen was busy writing. They all looked extremely peaceful and respectable, and for a moment Petan saw herself in an absurd light, leaning there in her wrapper, apparently the sole conspirator in the house.

Over the mantel-shelf was a mirror which Doveen faced. He glanced at this from time to time, and Petan noticed that it was not the charming reflection of Sylvia's head and shoulders which drew his eyes, but the Duke, who sat opposite; and that once their glances met in a deep look of understanding. Petan shivered and drew back, as though those four eyes could detect her and her thoughts.

Two hours later, when the ladies ascended, they found Petan at her door as they went by, her head done up in a wet towel, and every sign of suffering on her drawn face. She, with contrite apologies, admitted total inability to assist them, but when

THE SPIDER

Sylvia offered to nurse her, closed the door on her affectionate solicitations.

As soon as their footsteps had died away, Petan's head was unswathed and the door reopened, just the tiniest crack. She then sat down on the floor, her eye to the crack, and waited. The Duke's room was at her right, Margot's between; Doveen's on her left, farther down the corridor, and Reizet's in the other wing. Before long the Duke passed, leisurely, winding his watch, and entering his room, closed the door. Petan listened for the key to turn in the lock, but heard nothing. Then she heard the Vicomte saying good-night to Doveen at the head of the stairs, and the latter's step in the passage, and then his door close. It was too far away to hear whether he turned his key. Then, beyond, she heard the Princess' laugh, echoed by the Vicomte—and silence. The great house seemed suddenly a tomb in which even an echo would not live. Fifteen minutes passed. Petan again looked at her watch and saw that it lacked but ten minutes to midnight. In the darkness she went to her dressing table and fumbled softly until her hands found her powder-box and puff, and then with astonishing agility she was across the room and through the door, her felt slippers making no sound.

The passage was still and empty; only the shadows of bare trees in the quadrangle lay on the polished floor, from the row of windows opposite. On the wall on her right, between her door and Margot's, smiled a painted cavalier, gloved hand on hip, debonair, belaced, and beruffled. He seemed to smile as the odd spectacle of a stout woman in a shabby wrapper crept along beneath him and knelt before the Duke's door, powder puff in hand. Once, twice, thrice the puff returned to the box and then sprinkled a faint film of powder on the dark flooring before the door, too slight to be noticed by a casual eye.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Petan rose and like a shadow passed on down the passage, clinging to the wall, until she reached Doveen's door, where the same rite was performed. Then on to the distant wing, where before the Princess' door and that of the Vicomte the same performance was repeated. The way back seemed long, but at last Reizet's door was reached. From within came the sound of his voice humming softly an ancient chanson of love and war. Softly she tried the handle of the door, and drew a deep breath of relief to find it locked. Again the powder puff was requisitioned, and she stood upright. "It is I who will know who remains abed this night," she thought triumphantly.

But she was now impatient to get back to watch her quarry. It was after midnight, and if anything was to be done it would be before dawn, for Doveen had said he would return to Paris the following day. Petan reached her room in safety, and again took up her watch in the darkness before the crack in the door. Twice, as the hours dragged by, she heard a clock strike far away across the park. Then, suddenly, came a muffled click as of an opening door, so faint as to be almost inaudible, and impossible to locate. Petan's blood froze within her as she realised that now it was not supposition of possible danger, but danger real, present, to be faced by her alone. With an eye to the crack she waited. Yes, between her and the pale light from the window opposite a shadow passed and vanished, so noiselessly and quickly as to have mocked even her vigilance. In an instant she was erect and the door open. She looked out. There seemed to be nothing in the passage, but even as she was about to turn she saw a shadow spring up against the wall at the farther end, as though something had run along crouching among the shadows, and risen to descend the stair at the further end of the gallery. Whoever it was had turned the corner, unaware that the shadow betrayed. Petan, like another shadow, ran to the Duke's door and knelt.

THE SPIDER

Yes, the film of white was disturbed. It was, then, he. She started in pursuit, and was half way down the passage when she saw a second shadow before her, moving along the wall. Petan crouched back against the brown wainscoting and listened. Not a sound was heard as the two shadows melted into one and disappeared. For a moment she held her breath, then sped swiftly along to Doveen's door and bent. Yes, there, too, footprints betrayed his departure, and Petan smiled grimly in the darkness, then sped swiftly along and peered over the gallery rail to the hall below. All was in darkness, but as she listened a soft thud broke the silence. It was the closing of a little, padded door below the stairs, which swung on a spring and led from the main hall to a long, narrow passage between the central portion of the house to the library beyond the private chapel. This library was, therefore, practically detached from the inhabited part of the château, as the rooms above it were only utilised on state occasions.

Petan thought quickly. She could not follow them through the passage, for that would mean discovery, and also danger. Then she remembered the rear staircase used principally by servants, which lay between their own rooms and that distant wing. Had she time? She fled along back the way she had come till she passed her own door and went on to the head of the narrow staircase, running down between massive walls. It was a race as to who should reach the library first, and the two men, suspecting nothing, would take their time. Hers was the shorter route and at last, when she reached the library door, she paused and listened, panting for breath, but no sound came from within.

Softly she turned the handle and stepped inside. The great room was dark, save for a pale light which stole through heavy curtains at the end of the room, disclosing rich furnishings and book-lined walls. In the centre, placed diagonally, was a long table, and at either end of it a high-backed

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

settle. Between her and it there intervened all of twenty feet, and this space was broken by a tall turn-table of books, a palm, a draped easel supporting an illuminated Missal, and close to the door where she stood a Spanish-leather screen. Opposite was the door by which the two men must enter.

A moment or two passed, during which Petan took her bearings from behind the screen. She realised she was comparatively safe where she stood, as she had left the door open behind her, and they, knowing the improbability of any one entering by it at that hour, and that even if they did, footsteps on the passage would give warning, would doubtless ignore it. Petan also realised that no sound would reach the main house, and with that knowledge came the appreciation of her own perilous position. If they discovered her, her life would probably not be worth a fifty-centime piece. However, she held her ground, awaiting events, and in a few moments her thoughts were interrupted by a streak of light spreading fan-like under the door opposite. It slowly widened as the door opened, and the Duke, still in evening dress, appeared on the threshold, a candle in one hand, and in the other a small bundle tied up in a black-silk handkerchief.

He entered, paused and peered about the room, then crossed to the centre table, put down the candle and the bundle, and seated himself on the settle farthest away, facing Petan, who watched from between the panels of the screen.

In an instant, Doveen appeared also, carrying in one hand a small packet tied with pink tape and sealed with the Arms of France. Petan shuddered, and barely restrained a gasp of terror. How had he obtained it, and when? Where was Reizet, who would have parted with his life before relinquishing it. Doveen also paused, listening. He reminded Petan of an animal scenting danger. But, apparently satisfied, he crossed the room, passing the Duke, and sat down on

THE SPIDER

the other settle, his back to Petan, facing his fellow-conspirator. The watcher could now only see his head over the tall back on the settle. But, no, she saw something else: between the seat and the back there were six inches of space, through which she saw a portion of his dinner-coat and also the blue packet, which he had placed on the seat beside him.

The Duke was the first to speak.

"Well," he said in a low voice, "I see you got it. An unpleasant piece of business. I hope he isn't hurt."

"Not a bit. It was simple enough. I syringed chloroform through his keyhole near his bed, opened the door with a skeleton key, and neatly extracted it from his sock, which, as you told me, I found on the floor just under the edge of the bed. A clever expedient, for had you not told me I never should have searched there. He will sleep soundly and wake up with nothing worse than a headache."

The Duke moved restlessly. "Poor Jehan. Am sorry I had to ruin him, but it was a case of the survival of the fittest. When Germany shows her hand, who will believe he did not sell that packet to her? His career is as dead as last year's crop. But now to business. Here are the pearls which I—er—borrowed, for you to return to Madame Bradish to-morrow morning in any way you choose. She will load you with cash and encomiums and spread the fame of your prowess abroad."

The Duke pushed the little black bundle toward Doveen along the polished surface of the table, and Petan's sharp eyes noted how that fine hand shook, though the voice was even enough. Doveen rose and sauntered toward it, but did not take it. He leaned there, feet crossed, and nonchalantly lighted a cigarette, without speaking. During those three minutes Petan formed a plan, audacious and at first thought impossible. Twenty feet intervened between her and the packet, which lay plainly in sight on the seat of the settle. Could she

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

reach it unobserved? The risk was great, but worth the taking. She had but one life to lose, and was it not better to die thus, for the sake of those she loved and for France, than to submit to old age and perhaps an insignificant microbe? She measured the distance between the screen, the palm, high turn-table, and settle. All were in profound shadow. Her wrapper was dark; her felt slippers noiseless. If she crouched low she was out of their line of vision, even did they turn in her direction, and a merciful God had sent a wind sighing about the château, creaking branches without and slightly rattling the heavy shutters. Doveen was directly between her and the Duke, and even did he turn, she would, with care, escape his glance. Inch by inch she must make her way across the spaces between those objects, while one or the other of the two men was speaking, holding herself immovable during any silence. Immense self-control would be needed, for a false move, a careless breath would bring two desperate men upon her. Petan heard the match struck and saw a tiny light flare and scented a cigarette, and at Doveen's first word she crouched low and moved a step from behind the screen, every nerve taut, her mind pitched to a tension which brought the sweat to her forehead.

Doveen was speaking.

"Don't let us be in a hurry," he said in a leisurely voice. "I take an epicurean pleasure in the situation after these months of dull inaction and baffling annoyances. That trip to Amsterdam was trying, for I detest Dutch cooking. The flood in Paris was a streak of luck, and this is the first chance we have had to exchange confidences since I arrived."

Petan had gained a foot.

"Come, come, my friend," replied the Duke with a transparent effort toward suavity. "I've heard of your eccentricities, and that they must be humoured, but the risk——"

"There is none. We're as safe as though in our coffins. The

THE SPIDER

risk was when I was creeping around Reizet's bed. He is a muscular young man, and had he awakened and dropped on me—well, it might have gone ill with him. But, as you say, we must come to business. There are several matters to discuss."

"What is there to discuss?" said the Duke impatiently. "All is understood. As soon as I am paid by Germany, you shall have the tenth I promised you." (Petan had reached the palm and halted, trying to stifle her panting breath.) "I gave you my word, and I will keep it."

Doveen knocked the ashes from his cigarette to the floor and neatly obliterated them with his patent-leather pump. "H'm—a tenth. Germany will pay well. You will be a rich man. What a lot of good that money can do! Riches are power, security—respectability—all admirable. To think that all three are done up in an envelope tied with pink tape. Life is droll."

The Duke leaned forward across the table, struck by something odd in the other's voice.

"This is hardly the time for philosophising," he said sharply. "Come, give me the packet, take the pearls, and let us get to bed."

Petan was half way across the space between the palm and table, and yet the widest portion of Golgotha lay before her. Every muscle ached, yet Death she felt was at her heels.

Doveen turned and took the pearls and tossed them up and down in his hand, and backed away from the Duke toward the other end of the table to where the packet lay.

"As I told you," repeated the Duke, "I will keep my word."

Doveen had now reached his former seat, but remained standing, having placed the pearls beside the packet. Petan saw them, lying side by side, within ten feet of her. Could she ever reach, acquire them, and return that perilous way with them before the men finished parleying? She remembered

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

St. Joseph standing wrong side up on her bureau upstairs, and her spirit called to him for help as she gained another foot.

"You say you will keep your word," said Doveen slowly. "Keep it, by all means. As for me, I shall keep both the pearls and the—packet."

"Oh, come, Doveen! Be serious——"

"I am."

"This is no time for joking. It is business."

"You are right. It has been a joke up to the present moment, but now it is—business."

There was no mistaking the cool effrontery of Doveen's voice, and even Petan shivered where she crouched. Could she have seen, she would have seen the Duke's face slowly pale as his eyes met Doveen's. For a moment not one of the three in that silent room moved. Then Doveen said in an even voice:

"Did you really suppose that I would give up that packet and one hundred thousand francs' worth of pearls? I am a philanthropist, but not to the rich. My dear Duke, did you really have such faith in my amiability as to suppose I would accept a tenth of what Germany is to pay when I could keep the whole? Why, in the name of common sense, should I?"

Petan had gained a few inches when she heard a sudden snarl, as the Duke sprang; then Doveen's voice, tranquil and measured:

"*Voilà*. Sit down and keep quiet. Your muscles are soft, so don't be foolish."

"You scoundrel, I'll—I'll prosecute you!"

"Don't talk nonsense. For once your Excellency has been outwitted. You will do nothing, for, if you ruin me, you ruin yourself."

Petan gained another foot as she heard the Duke's voice strangled with anger.

THE SPIDER

"And you'd make of me a common thief? Give me those pearls. You know I only borrowed them for a purpose. My God! I can't believe it. I will give a third, a half——"

Doveen laughed lightly, careful to modulate his voice, while Petan at last gained the shelter of the turn-table, trembling for fear the two men might end the discussion before she accomplished the distance.

"You are helpless, Monsieur le Duc," he said. "However, I will be generous and send you a present from Berlin."

"I swear I shall punish you—you thief."

"Don't be rash. Surely you won't accuse me of stealing the pearls when I was in London."

"You—traitor!"

There was a moment's deadly silence, then Doveen spoke and raillery had no place in his voice now:

"You call me a—traitor?"

"You have betrayed me!" cried the Duke, casting discretion to the winds. "You have betrayed trust and hospitality. You have played the scoundrel to women who trusted you——"

Doveen laughed low, and the laugh was not pleasant to Petan, who was now half way to the easel. It had the sharpness of a dagger's edge as he leaned forward over the table toward the Duke, who shrank back before the sudden fury of that glance. It was as though fires, long smouldering, leapt to the surface of an abyss of long-suppressed hate.

"Friend; hospitality; trust. Nice words from you to me. Traitor to what and to whom? I am only a creature to be used and dismissed like a lackey by such men as you. Your Excellency, as Ambassador to Germany, earned a reputation for patriotism. And now, you work for what? For France? No. For gold to be paid you by her enemies. Have I not as much right to that packet as you? What I do, I do for the poor: for those whom Fate treats as it treated me. Men like you create crime and go unpunished. The poor man steals

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

a loaf and is trapped and caged. The financier robs and lives, fawned upon and honoured. I hate and despise a society which honours where dishonour is due. Your so-called Law and Justice are farcical, and I hold myself beyond them—a Law unto myself. A double life you say. Whose life is not double? It is only that I play the game with greater skill and courage."

Petan now crouched within two feet of the settle. She put out her hand and drew the packet to her breast. Her other hand went forth, pitifully uncertain, while the sweat dripped from her face and her heart pounded against the packet. The pearls were a few inches further away, and she had to take another step. Her hand was on them, and lifted them. Then she stood motionless, while silence brooded with sinister significance. Surely they would hear the beating of her heart. Doveen had but to turn his head and all was lost.

The Duke had risen, for Petan could now see the top of his waistcoat through the four or five inches of space between the seat of the settle and its back. One fine hand was gripping the table's edge, skin taut and white across the knuckles. She had the moral strength to turn away as he spoke, to retrace her steps, though now she had her enemies at her back, only able to know that they remained where they were, by their voices. She saw the gaping door twenty feet away, and gave thanks that the one candle which dimly illuminated the vast room, remained between the two men, throwing its tiny circle of light in their eyes.

"You are nothing, then, but a human thief," said the Duke.

Doveen shrugged his shoulders, unmoved by the epithet. "Did I steal any pearls? I retain what was given me: that is all. You spoke of my eccentricities; one of them is socialistic. My code is to share wealth with those who have none. I am entirely consistent, for I do unto myself what I would have others do. Have you never wondered what becomes of the

THE SPIDER

large sums I receive from the State and other sources? My habits are simple. Know then, that every mark I receive, from any source, goes to the poor, whom Fate has treated as it treated me. The pearls remain with me, to do more good than that Mrs. Bradish, a bundle of vanity and cheap ambitions, would ever have done. You call it—thievery. I call it justice.”

Petan was now halfway to the door, pearls and packet close to her breast, where suspense laid its sickening grip upon her. The men’s voices were no longer restrained, but the room was too isolated to endanger them. But its isolation endangered Petan, and she knew that now any second might be her last. The Duke had fallen back on the settle, his face white against its dark background. He passed one hand across his eyes and forehead with a gesture of dazed exhaustion, as though he had run a race to defeat.

“Doveen,” he said at last, in a faint voice, “I am at your mercy; but let common sense control you, instead of this inflated mockery of sentiment. I will pay you double; I will share with you half and half. You will thus receive as much as though you sold it to Germany, and remain innocent of a dastardly act toward me. I at least trusted you, and meant to keep the financial side of the bargain. What difference does it make to you from whence the money comes, if you get it? As to the pearls, keep them. If you accede to me, I will replace them out of my own pocket, unless you keep it empty. You see—er——”

The Duke hesitated, and Petan, behind her last refuge, hesitated also while Doveen stepped backward slowly to the settle, keeping his face toward his adversary.

“Go on,” said he, smiling. “Be frank. What other reason have you why I should betray the interests of the poor?”

“One you will think of lightly,” replied the Duke, rising.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"A woman. Mademoiselle Bradish, whom I hope to marry. It happens that I have come to—love her."

"Whew!" breathed Doveen through smiling lips. "So the bird is actually snared through his affections."

The Duke made a gesture of negation. "Don't scoff at the truth when you hear it—from me. She owns me, body and soul, and feels nothing for me but—contempt. Why? Because she thinks I love only her money. I did, but she has diabolical charm. Never have I known such allure. I tell you, man, I am mad for her. I must drive derision from her eyes. Only wealth can do it. I want to throw back the money her mother offers me, and give—give—give. Force her to acknowledge she has misjudged me! compel her respect! bring her to her knees—to my arms. My God! I would crush her in them——"

Doveen laughed softly. "Rhapsodies. What you say is so wholly absurd that it proves the truth of your condition. Maudlin wickedness. You—to compel—her—respect, and I, to pay for it. Gott in Himmel! have you taken leave of your senses?"

The Duke made an inarticulate sound, and Petan, pausing at the door, looked back. His head had fallen on his folded arms, and the Spider stood looking down upon that prostrate figure with a strange smile. Then his hand went out behind him, feeling along the seat at his back blindly for his booty, his eyes on the Duke, but Petan was now speeding as swiftly as she dared along the passage. Any moment death might take up the chase and drag her back. She clutched the two bundles to her breast as she flew along in the darkness, her breath coming in whistling gasps. The way seemed long. Always she saw that sinewy hand stealing along the denuded seat. At what instant would he turn and find it empty? Instinct and fear guiding her, she sped noiselessly through tortuous passages where shadows sprang to meet her, and at last reached the foot

THE SPIDER

of the stairs. Clinging to the rail, she groped her way upward, the blood pounding in her ears. Suddenly she heard, far down the passage, soft padding of running feet. She glimpsed the uppermost stair, gained it, and then, by immense effort, controlled the impulse to run, held her muscles in check, and softly, noiselessly, even slowly, went down the corridor to her room. As she soundlessly turned the handle of her door, the padding steps neared the top of the stairs. Another breathless second and she was within—the latch in its socket—safe.

Petan leaned against the closed door, listening. He must be there, only a few yards away, looking down that empty corridor, wondering whether the eavesdropper had come that way, and who it was. What baffled despair must urge revenge within the heart that beat there, so close, yet invisible. Petan dared not move. Whichever of the twain was there, he must never know that the one he sought was Petan.

Then suddenly she heard steps pass her door. They did not pass as though suspicious of her, but passed on down the corridor, and a moment later they returned, stealing by her, with only one thickness of oaken planking between her and that formidable force of evil. She heard the cautious closing of the Duke's door. It, then, had been he. What were his thoughts in that room beyond, and where was the Spider, whose web had involved them both in disaster?

Petan dragged herself weakly to her bed and lay down. There, against the bone buttons of her shabby wrapper, rising and falling with her laboured breath, lay Sylvia's happiness, her man's honour, and perhaps the future of France. Her trembling fingers touched the packet lovingly, as her pulses calmed and her thoughts became ordered. The ticking of her watch recalled her to the necessity of deciding what next must be done. Not yet was the hour come for self-congratulation and repose. Before dawn both pearls and packet must be restored, but how? What was the wisest course to pursue?

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

What was to be done now might have far-reaching results, for other interests than personal ones were involved. The welfare of two nations hung in the balance. War, with its untold horrors, might spring from a hasty decision. Poor Petan sighed and trembled, finding courage more easily acquired than wisdom. Then human nature asserted its ignoble prerogative. Revenge was the first joy to be tasted. She recalled the cold, smiling face of the Duke near the flickering candle as he revealed his crime. Oh! to see that face blanch with fear; to see him come fawning upon the humble Petan's favour—she, whom he had invariably treated with indifferent condescension. She had power and she luxuriated in the novelty of the sensation. He had felt no pity for others; why feel it for him? The Law might never reach him. Then how was he to be punished?

Suddenly Petan caught her breath. What had she heard? She sat up in the darkness, listening. An agonised sound smote the silence, as though wrung from depths long buried. It came from Margot's room, so faint and muffled as hardly to be heard. Was he there, by the child's bed? Petan, with her mind's eye, saw him, bowed above the sleeping child—broken, undone, facing ruin, his career ended, financial disaster near, not knowing what the morrow would bring forth.

Margot, care-free, innocent, helpless, ignorant of the calamity about to overtake her father—her sole protector in a selfish world. Margot. She had forgotten Margot.

She recalled those clinging arms, the touch of guileless lips. A voice, rarely heard, sounded from the depths of her woman's consciousness, calling to her starved mother instinct to protect one so helpless. The echo of that sleepy voice thrilled her ear again: "*Je t'aime.*" No. She was incapable of destroying Margot. But, on the other hand—justice. She must look at the problem from all sides. Reizet and Sylvia loved each other; in fact had done so since that memorable night when Sylvia had bestowed the rose on her lover through the fence.

THE SPIDER

To-morrow Reizet would deliver the packet to the Minister of War and thereby reap honour, riches and fame. Mrs. Bradish could not refuse her consent to so brilliant a match, and therefore the Duke, villain though he be, would become an established factor in Sylvia's life, as Reizet's cousin. What disgraced him would reflect on Sylvia, indirectly, of course, therefore public scandal must be avoided at all costs. Petan sighed. Was sweet revenge to be sacrificed, and the Duke go unpunished? Never. Plans and plots passed in turn through Petan's head, each to be declined as impracticable, until, suddenly, the simplest of them all illuminated her brain. It was to do nothing at all.

The Duke knew some one had been in the library, and that the "some one" had overheard all his blasting confession of intended crime and treason. Some one knew him for a criminal, both in intent and deed; that he had meant to rob his cousin of the fruits of his labour, as he had robbed his friend and hostess of her jewels; he, the Duke de Petrinac, formerly His Excellency, the French Ambassador to Germany.

But—and here lay the sting—he would never know WHO that some one was. There lay the terrifying horror and shame. Over his head would hang forever an invisible sword, which at any moment might fall. Never again would he know peace or security. His very soul would shrivel with the passing years. Fear would dog his footsteps; suspense would gnaw his nerves. As he looked at the Vicomte, Mrs. Bradish, the Princess, Mrs. Morely, his fear would go beyond them in an ever-widening circle of suspicion. He would never know who knew, or who did not know of his shame, as he walked with a forced smile along the edge of an abyss which might claim him at any moment. With the knowledge that some one, somewhere, knew him for what he was, would come the doubt of the sincerity of any friendship or affection. He would not dare carry on any career, for fear of that invisible

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

hand pushing him from his eminence to public ignominy. Behind smiles he would suspect contempt; a careless glance or averted eye would spell to him hatred. He would never know at what moment the iron hand of the Law would touch him on the shoulder, pointing him toward gaping prison doors. Petan smiled grimly in the darkness, for revenge was hers after all, and it was sweet.

As for Reizet—should she tell him of how she had saved him from ruin? What good would it do—and what harm? He was now safe. But to know his cousin for a criminal and a traitor was to place him under the bar of an obligation to Law and Justice. He would have to denounce his own relative, and thus disgrace his own name, or cheat Justice and be an accessory to crime. No. Reizet must never know.

And Sylvia—was she to be told how her Petan had saved one more dear than life from disgrace and poverty? As Reizet's wife, she would carry a loathsome secret, which she could never share with him to whom all secrets should be told. It would raise a barrier between her soul and his, dimming the radiance in which they were to walk, hand-in-hand, toward a happy old age. Fear, also, would taint her happiness, knowing that at any moment Doveen might again pass by, casting his melancholy shadow of crime across the sunshine of her days. No! As Reizet's wife, she must never know how close she lived to shame and sin. Mrs. Bradish? Never. Petan knew that lady's capacity for tenacious prejudice, and what use she would make of such facts to disrupt any possible alliance between Sylvia and Reizet. Utica codes were not elastic, and Mrs. Bradish would veto any new relatives who stole pearl necklaces and betrayed their country for cash. No, Mrs. Bradish could never be told of Petan's prowess, and how she had bearded two villains in the midst of their villainies.

Petan sighed, and a tear rolled down her sallow cheek. Self-abnegation was proving as hard as frustrating crime, but she

THE SPIDER

bravely faced the temptation to claim the laurels she had won, and made up her mind to face the future where she would continue to play the rôle of merely a discreet person of humble but faithful acumen. No glory would ever be hers; no gratitude or appreciation. Her days would be filled with commonplace duties, while she continued to live on the edge of others' lives, nibbling crumbs which fell from their rich table. She would continue to be treated with tolerant kindness; to be used and useful; to reflect the happiness of others meekly and gratefully, and, as old age crept upon her, perhaps be set aside. Only God would ever know.

Petan rose softly. Through the window crept the pure chill which heralds the day's eternal resurrection. The room was cold and she shivered. Throwing about her shoulders a grey knitted shawl, she found the remnant of coffee and drank it. There was work still to be done.

The château was wrapped in silence as Petan cautiously opened her door and stole forth into the corridor. Mrs. Bradish slept soundly, but, with a thought to the Duke, Petan crept past his room and carefully turned the handle of her mistress' door. The room was dim, but Petan discerned the dressing-table by the still unmended window, and placed the pearls, denuded of their silk covering, where their owner had last seen them. Then, with a loving look at Sylvia's room beyond, she found herself again in the corridor. She tiptoed to the Duke's door and neatly folding the black silk handkerchief, placed it on the floor by his threshold. Then she went on down the passage. When she neared Doyeen's door she paused, afraid. A bar of light lay across the floor before her. His door was open and Petan drew back against the wall, listening. But profound silence lay like a pall about her, and she went softly on and looked in. The room was empty. The bird had flown. She reached the west wing and Reizet's door. Remembering how a skeleton key had unlocked it, she gently

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

turned the handle and went in. A sickly odour greeted her nostrils. She crossed to the bed and leaned above him. That fine head she had once seen beneath pink tissue paper roses in a restaurant, long ago, now lay high on the pillows, but turned to one side with unnatural lassitude. She listened. His breath came slowly, wearily. Petan bent and found a black silk sock on the floor, and into it she slid the precious packet, thrusting it back under the edge of the bed. Again she bent above that quiet sleeper, but he did not stir. "May the good God bless thee!" she breathed. Then she went to the window and flung it wide, drawing in deep breaths of pure air. She went out, and closed the door.

CHAPTER XV: THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

THE day following that night of adventure, the sun rose in a cloudless sky, bathing the drowned world in a radiance which was reflected in the château.

Mrs. Bradish, on awakening, had pattered in her satin mules to the window through whose orifice the unfamiliar sunshine sent disturbing effulgence. As she was about to draw across it the heavy curtain, that she might enjoy another nap, she suddenly beheld, glowing on the dressing table—her pearls! For a moment she doubted the evidences of her senses, but after touching them warily and finding them actualities, rushed to Sylvia, shook her awake, dragged her from bed to the table, and pointed at the miracle, too choked with emotion for speech.

Sylvia stared from sleep-dimmed eyes. "Perhaps they were never taken," she cried. "Perhaps I—you—have been dreaming."

"Nonsense!" cried Mrs. Bradish, recovering her tongue. "We don't dream similar events; we, and every inmate of this house. No. It is that angel Doveen, who has found the thief and the pearls. I shall make him the most famous man in France before another sun has set. Ring for Petan. We must dress. She must tell the others. Quick!"

Petan came, already neat as to attire, and was properly ecstatic at sight of the necklace, and when Mrs. Bradish and Sylvia sang Doveen's praises, while she dressed them, joined in their chorus with commendable enthusiasm. It was Petan who, at Mrs. Bradish's dictation, wrote a fulsome note to the Spider, which she was directed to see delivered with that

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

gentleman's coffee in person. Mrs. Bradish also called for her check book, and while filling in a check with three figures, kept up a running fire of praise.

"What genius! And what modesty," she cried, "to thus avoid publicity and to present them without a word." Her vanity winced, however, at the thought that he must have seen her postiche on its accustomed candlestick when he placed the recovered necklace on her dressing table.

Petan was also called upon to carry the glad news to the other inmates of the château, and her sense of humour supported her through this trying ordeal. When she knocked at the Duke's door, that gentleman opened it himself. Petan cast one lightning glance at his devastated face, from which the last remnant of youth had fled, then dropped her eyes in modest consciousness of his inadequate attire.

"Bon jour, Monsieur le Duc," said she.

"Bon jour, Madame," said he, plainly at a loss for the reason of this matutinal visit. "I fancied it was the arrival of my boots."

"Monsieur will pardon my intrusion," said Petan, "when he learns the joyous nature of my errand. Madame sent me to inform Monsieur that during the night her necklace was restored to her. Madame could not wait longer before imparting the glad news, knowing how rejoiced Monsieur would be.

The Duke made an inarticulate sound, his lips parted in a strained smile, and Petan, in pity, hurried on.

"Madame also gave me this note to deliver to the incomparable Monsieur Doveen, but as we find that he has, with wonderful modesty, already returned to Paris, may I take the liberty of requesting Monsieur to forward it? Madame and Mademoiselle beg to thank Monsieur for having obtained his distinguished services."

The Duke drew his abbreviated robe about him as though to hide a wound.

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

"Present my compliments to the ladies," he said in a colourless voice, "and tell them how sincere is my pleasure in this matter. Monsieur Doveen is indeed a surprising man, and I shall have the satisfaction of telling him my opinion of his remarkable performance at my earliest opportunity."

The Duke bowed, Petan curtsied and withdrew.

Her visits to the other inmates of the château were more agreeable, but less interesting. All echoed Mrs. Bradish's pleasure and gratitude, as well as her praises of that marvelous genius who recovered pearl necklaces from the unknown, and then vanished to avoid thanks.

While Petan was preparing an inadequate bath for Sylvia, before an equally inadequate fire, her charge sighed remorsefully from among her pillows.

"You and I ought to be ashamed of ourselves," she cried, "to have harboured suspicions of that industrious and efficient Spider. To think that while I was spying on him, relegating to him all sorts of mysterious villainies, that he was even then probably thinking how he could restore mother's pearls and escape. The Duke—bless him! It was he who got him here, and, after all, he is the one we should thank. Petan, we are detestable. Acknowledge it."

Petan's mouth closed in obstinate curves, for this was too much for even her powers of dissimulation. To vow herself detestable for fancying Doveen a villain was more than she was able to accomplish. She waved a bath towel to and fro before the meagre flame.

"Ah, well, my apple, the Duke and the Spider may have their points. I am the last one to declare either without them, but while my head acknowledges the possibility, there is something here (she touched her snug corsage) which forbids my loving either. Men are queer. Even the saints no doubt had their tantrums. I'll warrant St. Anthony had his regrets for

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

having resisted that naughty charmer who tried to overcome his prejudices against our sex."

"Of course, Petan," replied Sylvia, "but I shall have to be nicer to the Duke——"

Petan came to the bedside and waggled a bony finger at Sylvia.

"Just ease up, my dove," she said slowly, "on your niceness to Monsieur le Duc. I saw him this morning. He looks nervous and—er—depressed; just in the mood to take several kilometres if you offered him a centimetre. There now! Hurry and dress, for 'he' is abroad already. I fly, for thy mother calls."

Petan had found Reizet's room empty when she had gone to him with Mrs. Bradish's message, but had espied him mounting a big bay horse before the terrace below, and watched him ride away in the direction of the neighbouring château, where the Minister of War lay, now conscious and ready for business.

Petan decided it was now high time that the matter between the lovers was brought to a satisfactory conclusion. Without doubt, the Duke would now press his suit with energy, for Sylvia (and her money) was all that remained between him and disaster, and Petan had no idea of allowing circumstances to favour him if she could help it.

Reizet was French, and therefore could not declare his passion properly until he had received Mrs. Bradish's consent. Those delightful preliminaries by the fence were all very charming, but they lacked that solidity and convention which Petan considered necessary to a proper courtship.

As she laboured under the delusion that all was understood between Reizet and Sylvia, only Madame's consent remained to be gained. That Petan believed Sylvia quite ready to be won mattered nothing as regards formalities. The affair must be made at least to appear regular, that Mrs. Bradish

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

might never suspect how shockingly irregular it had been. Reizet must be made to woo all over again publicly, for Petan desired above all things for herself, as well as for Sylvia, that her own reputation for dignity and a dragon's watchfulness should be preserved.

With this end in view, Petan, free to follow her own bent, went to her room and attired herself in hat and jacket, two-button black gloves and veil, for a promenade through the avenue by which Reizet would return. Word had come from Paris that the flood was receding, and the ladies were anxious to get back to their respective domiciles at the earliest possible moment. It had been arranged that the Vicomte was to return to Paris with his guests that afternoon after luncheon, and Petan wanted matters settled before the Duke could re-establish his intimacy with Sylvia in Paris, where Reizet was at a disadvantage.

Petan well knew Sylvia's capacity for "being sorry" for an injustice done, and the Duke would be quick to feel her softened mood toward him, and profit thereby.

Jehan had received a note from Jack, saying that he and his aunts were again domiciled in their house, and that he found the cellars excellent representations of submerged caverns, wherein to spear imaginary fish with carving knives, and that, the garden being a marsh, he sailed the high seas thereon, on the plank cover of the coal cellar, with considerable enjoyment. Jehan therefore was also anxious to return to town, before any untoward accident should prostrate his aunts and deprive him of a brother.

A few hours would see the lovers separated, and Petan found it an imperative duty to accelerate Cupid's cause. She could not know that Reizet was at that very moment accelerating the bay mare toward that very goal as rapidly as muddy roads permitted.

He had delivered his packet, and the French Army was now

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

assured of clothing, blankets, and tents—lighter, warmer and more durable than any army in the world, while his own future was no longer hampered by sordid economy. Therefore, that sunshiny morning seemed to him radiant, and he sang from a light heart as he rode homeward.

Petan heard his voice soaring blithely above swaying tree-tops, long before she espied his gallant figure, and tears of emotion dimmed her tired eyes as she caught the words unblushingly thrown to the skies:

“Who is Sylvia? What is she
That all the swains commend her?
Wholly fair and wise is she,
Heaven such grace doth lend her
That adored she should be.
Then to Sylvia let us sing
For Sylvia is excelling;
She excels each living thing
Upon the round earth dwelling.
To her let us garlands bring.”

Suddenly he saw Petan under the trees by the road. As he drew up his horse beside her and bared his head in greeting he noticed that her face looked pale and tired.

“*Bon jour, Monsieur,*” she said suavely. “You are out too early to have heard the glad news. Madame’s necklace has been found and restored, and the wonderful Monsieur Doveen has gone to Paris.”

Reizet looked his astonishment, and again Petan had to listen to lavish praises of the men whose villainies she had frustrated. She bore it stolidly, wondering if the subject would ever be dropped by the two families in whose midst her place her mouth shut. Reizet noticed that her eyes held a strange

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

expression while he expressed his pleasure and admiration.

"As you say," she replied, "the two gentlemen are remarkable. No one can acknowledge it better than I. But why out so early, Monsieur?"

Reizet looked up to the blue sky, where baby clouds drifted.

"Is it early?" he asked, smiling. "I only know that it is day; and that the long night is ended."

"Did you know also, Monsieur, that the ladies return to Paris after luncheon?"

Reizet came down from the clouds.

"Indeed. Then I go also," he replied promptly.

"It would be well," said Petan significantly. "Paris is not the place for the intimacy which one enjoys here. I fear that we shall see but little of Monsieur there."

"That depends," replied Reizet, smiling down into Petan's anxious eyes. "Such matters can be controlled, and—I mean to control them."

"But Madame Bradish——"

"A charming woman. We understand each other now better than I should have thought possible."

Petan heaved a sigh of deep content. "So now, nothing stands in the way of my angel having her heart's desire. *Quel bonheur.*"

Reizet looked somewhat bewildered, not dreaming of Petan's distorted conception of the situation. "You mean a garden party on my lawn?"

Petan found this remark, considering circumstances, banal, and replied somewhat irritably: "Not at all, though no doubt that will be arranged when more important matters are settled."

"You mean that I am to sell my house and garden?" queried the puzzled Reizet.

Petan shrugged her shoulders with impatient good humour, feeling that shy lovers needed tactful handling. "I mean, that

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

since Mademoiselle presented Monsieur with that rose, so eloquent of her sentiments for him, that, as Monsieur knows, she has cherished Monsieur in her heart with true fidelity, and—well—perhaps action now would——” Petan made a significant gesture.

Reizet was now as curious as he was astonished. Evidently there was something here unknown to him, and instinct told him that a careless word might close the avenue of information. He smiled, stroking his lean jaw with a gesture of happy contemplation.

“Hum! Fence——” he murmured, with a sidelong glance at Petan.

Petan, now free to launch herself on a stream of sentiment, shook her finger at him archly.

“Pretend not,” she said. “I know all. For months I have carried her secret in this bosom. Ah! the delicacy with which Mademoiselle adores Monsieur. If she has failed to demonstrate it blame me, not her, for it was I who forbade her to pat Monsieur’s curls through the fence, and——”

“You say Mademoiselle has loved me. For how long?” asked Reizet, in an odd voice.

“The calendar can give you the date better than I, but what are such prosaic details as compared to the fact? I only speak thus frankly, Monsieur, because Time, like Youth, is fleeting, and happiness——”

Reizet swung himself down from his horse.

“Madame, your conversation, as always, interests me profoundly,” he said, bowing before her. “Permit me to walk along with you, that we may exchange confidences at our leisure. As you were about to say, happiness must not be allowed to lag. It must be grasped lest it escape. In this case, happiness for me is represented by Mademoiselle; is it not so?”

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

Petan nodded ecstatically. "And for her, happiness is represented by Monsieur."

"A remarkable coincidence," remarked Reizet.

"Not remarkable, Monsieur, considering the skill and charm with which Monsieur has conducted the affair. Truly, after what Mademoiselle told me, no maid could have resisted."

"You flatter me, Madame," said Reizet gravely, wondering to what she alluded. "I beg you to tell me all, for in truth this conversation touches me deeply."

Petan, with her cautious brain bidding her to be discreet and tell nothing, opened her mouth and told everything, vastly relieved that, after months of silence and pretence, the fence was indeed down, and communication frankly established.

"Mademoiselle told me of Monsieur's pure and loving heart. She admired Monsieur's skill at football, his gentleness with rabbits and his manner of saying his prayers beside her in the Madelaine. She deplored that a fence twelve feet high and a parent's prejudices should divide her from Monsieur, and the society of his admirable aunts, and regretted her inability not to be a sister to him."

"H'm!" said Reizet. "A sister! Within the hour I shall suggest to her a better relationship than that of a sister. That is American, not French. And what else did Mademoiselle say?"

"Mademoiselle told me of delightful hours spent in Monsieur's society at Luna Park, and said that she preferred riding on top of an omnibus with him, to dining at the home of Monsieur le Duc, his cousin."

Reizet pulled both coat lapels meditatively, eyes bent earthward in an abstracted frown.

"You do, indeed, surprise me. Truly, I had no idea how deeply I was loved, or how such simple methods of wooing could impress a maid. By the way, have you ever chanced to hear Mademoiselle mention my brother Jack?"

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Petan now looked puzzled, and shook her head. "No, never have I heard her mention him. I doubt if Mademoiselle has the pleasure of his acquaintance."

Reizet vaulted back into the saddle, and, from above, smiled down into Petan's lifted eyes.

"One never knows," said he. "I have a fancy that they may have met. I will, in any case, suggest to Mademoiselle that she become a sister to him, rather than to me. And, Madame, permit me to tender to you my most respectful homages for the kindly interest you have evinced, and I trust that in the future you may share the happiness you have done so much to accomplish."

Reizet put out his hand, into which Petan placed her black-gloved fingers. Reizet bared his head, bent low, and laid a kiss upon that hand, little knowing that it had indeed given him not only happiness, but wealth and honour. She watched him ride away, gay and gallant, and tears dimmed her dragon's eyes, not of grief, but of joy, for she was a sentimental dragon, and found even a mirage of love surpassing sweet.

Reizet rode onward, firm in the intention of seeing Mrs. Bradish alone for the necessary formality of demanding her daughter's hand in marriage before luncheon. If the daughter could be interviewed, so much the better. Petan's confidences had somehow raised his spirits to blissful heights, although they had been uttered under a misapprehension. But to hear that Sylvia loved him was inexpressibly sweet, even though Petan was wrong, and had no ground whatever for so thinking. But it was a good augury and Reizet prayed with all his soul that in this instance "thought suggestion" might indeed work their subconscious will.

He hastened his pace and soon descended before the terrace, where already hand luggage was piled in readiness for departure. As he mounted the steps, Reizet espied the Duke and

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

Mrs. Bradish leaning over the balustrade, ostensibly admiring the view, but their words were unavoidably audible.

"I must apologise for my daughter's impulsiveness," Mrs. Bradish was saying. "Forgive her youth, and try again."

The Duke shrugged his shoulders. He looked wan and old in the noonday light, though his travelling costume was as spruce as ever. "Mademoiselle seems to have made up her mind."

"Perhaps; but her heart may change it," replied Mrs. Bradish with an encouraging smile through her lorgnons, but the Duke remained morose, and Reizet, scenting complications, passed on into the house. Evidently it was not a propitious moment for his own matrimonial complexities, but he could have shouted for joy. Sylvia had evidently turned his cousin down, and to save his life, Reizet could not feel properly sympathetic.

The rest of the time before their departure all was confusion, and Mrs. Bradish as elusive as a flea. Sylvia also evaded him, though at luncheon, when he caught her eyes, an adorable, timid self-consciousness seemed to emanate from them, as though appealing for consideration. Did she read his determination and fear it? He would soon eradicate fear by tenderness.

Later, when Reizet tucked Mrs. Bradish snugly into the omnibus, she accepted his attention as blandly as though such things as land, a fence and trespassing rabbits had never been heard of, and when Reizet audaciously winked at Petan as though to say, "Peace is declared," the dragon winked back with brazen effrontery. Sylvia caught both signals of understanding and wondered. Surely her world was becoming more topsy-turvy with each passing hour.

The party shared the same compartment, but the Duke and the Vicomte soon departed to the smoker, leaving the ladies to novels and gossip. Mrs. Morely sat beside Reizet, who had

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

not the strength of mind to tear himself away from Sylvia's proximity; for he, desperate and determined, swore a mighty oath to himself to bring matters to a crisis before Paris reclaimed them. Mrs. Morely was on his side, he knew, for she had taken infinite pains to "doctor" Mrs. Bradish the evening before, and Reizet indulged in frankness for the second time that day.

"Do you think I have a chance?" he asked that lady in a low voice, endeavouring to preserve an unmoved countenance.

"Certainly you have, with Sylvia," she replied, "and I believe also with her mother. Her social ambitions are merely misdirected affections. But be daring, not humble. Patronise her indirectly. She is the kind that misunderstands simplicity. Tell her that, while your haughty relatives may object to the marriage, that you love Sylvia too deeply to allow worldly considerations to stand in your way. Add the hope that in time they will become reconciled to their disappointment, and that you feel sure Sylvia will eventually enjoy all the prerogatives of the position you can give her. Demand—not ask. Assure her that the Republic is on its last legs. That will fetch her, for a court is even more desirable than your garden."

Reizet laughed. "She will be sure to speak of that fence."

"Tell her it will be torn down, and ask her advice regarding planting red umbrellas in its place for the wedding breakfast."

"I really like her," said Reizet. "She loves her daughter to distraction—so do I, so we have that bond in common. She is also an extremely intelligent woman; knows human nature, and plays on its weaknesses, and those who fancy her a fool, are fooled. She has gauged this American Colony perfectly, and managed it to suit her own ends admirably. You will see, after our marriage, that she will preserve the best of it for

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

her visiting list and drop the others with such a thud that the jar will be felt by every teacup."

Mrs. Morely smiled, uneasily eyeing Mrs. Bradish opposite, but that lady was frankly asleep, her head on a smart red morocco cushion.

"She will make enemies, of course, and for the future I shall hear accounts of her past, as varied as they are hectic, with villainies. They will endow her with a dozen husbands, a dozen origins and countless misdeeds which she never dreamed of, but let one of them get an invitation to dinner, and you will see that lucky one speeding on the wings of a taxicab so fast that gendarmes will complain. But—she will not care. She will be up out of the struggle, serenely afloat above criticism and backbiting. She will call your cousin by his *petit nom* in public, and meet the best people at his house. She may—marry him."

Reizet shook his head. "No. That she can never do. He knows her too well, and respects her acumen too thoroughly. Also, he loves his liberty, and Mrs. Bradish's husband would have none."

"Ah, well," yawned Mrs. Morely, "I'm sleepy. Run away and think it out. May good luck attend you. Don't ask Sylvia if she loves you. Tell her she does. She is tired of having men crawling round on their knees. She wants to be lifted up to a strong heart, and held there, against all comers. Now pull down the curtain. My eyes haven't seen the sun for so long they blink like a mole's."

Left to his own devices, Reizet glanced about. Sylvia was deep in a volume on the habits and origin of turtles, which the Vicomte had begged her to peruse. She sat between her mother and the Princess, who nibbled caraway seeds from a little reticule, and knitted a grey worsted petticoat. Petan was at the other end of the compartment next to the corridor, apparently lost in thought, but in reality exceedingly wide

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

awake. Reizet, desperate, rose, and as he passed her on his way out, made a significant motion, and an instant later Petan quietly rose and followed him, to where he leaned against the window-bar, out of sight of the others within.

The train hurtled along through half-submerged fields, and Reizet guided Petan's swaying steps to the further end of the corridor, until they reached the square space near the platform. From there he peered round the corner to assure himself that their confabulation was unsuspected. Petan braced herself against the wall, only too pleased to find herself tête-à-tête with her hero.

"My friend," said Reizet, "for I permit myself to thus consider you, I find that Madame Bradish is as difficult to approach as royalty. In spite of my best efforts to reach her ear, I have failed; yet I cannot in honour proceed with Mademoiselle until I have succeeded with her mother. Yet, such is my impatience, that if you cannot arrange for Madame to come out here where I can demand her daughter's hand in marriage, I swear that such is my desperation, that I shall shout my intentions aloud to her in the compartment before them all."

Petan felt the force of his words and pondered, deep in thought, though highly edified by his pretence that nothing had preceded these ceremonies between him and Sylvia.

"I have it," she said at last. "Madame Bradish is not really asleep, I think. She is sensitive as to the set of her postiche. I shall intimate to her that it is one side, and thus betrays itself; she will then seek the dressing room, and you may meet her in this passage, as though just returning from the smoker. The rest I leave to your tongue and Madame's pleasure."

Petan wrung Reizet's hand and departed, leaving the latter with one eye peeping round the corner, on the lookout for the proper moment to appear. It was an agitating moment, and he wondered what would result. Petan, having regained

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

her seat, was chagrined to find that the object of their solicitude was, in truth, sound asleep. To add to her exasperation the pompadour was indeed awry. Petan, aware of the impatient lover waiting in the corridor, and fearing that suspense and inaction would drive him to the desperate expedient he had threatened, was in despair, till suddenly the idea dawned that Sylvia might console him. Being under the erroneous impression that all was understood between them, Petan saw no reason why they should be denied a pleasant half hour, so she leaned forward and touched Sylvia's knee. The girl glanced up from her book and read an urgent message in her dragon's eye.

"You are stiff, *chérie*," said Petan audibly, "sitting there so long. Come out in the corridor for a little promenade."

Sylvia, nothing loath, rose and followed the wily one; and Reizet, from his hiding place, was regaled by the sight of their two backs swaying down the corridor away from him. He surmised that Petan's intended ruse had failed, but could not be altogether sorry. Though every road may have a turning, a railway corridor has none, and soon they came toward him, arm in arm, Petan pointing out the beauties of the landscape through the grimy windows. As they came near his hiding place, Reizet boldly stepped forth, and came toward them with an air of pleased surprise, relying on Petan's imagination to do the rest.

"Ah! Monsieur," she said as they met, "the cigar is finished? What a privilege it is that man is able at will to make of himself a chimney."

Reizet smiled wickedly.

"You and I, Madame, know that sometimes there is but little fire where there is much smoke, and no chimney at all."

Sylvia looked from one to the other, puzzled, but Petan ignored the allusion.

"Love lights fires," said she, "in palaces as well as garrets.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

Now, in your case, my precious birds, it burned through a twelve-foot fence; is it not so?"

This amiable remark fell like a bomb among the trio. Reizet understood that its cause was Petan's mistake as to the identity of the one who had kept that tryst by the fence, but Sylvia, aghast, shocked and wrathful, recognised only the truth of the bare fact thus brutally declared. She turned a stricken and burning face to Petan, who had thus betrayed her.

"Petan," she gasped. "How dare you?"

Reizet realised the peril of so critical a situation, and hastened to speak.

"Madame Petan confuses facts a little, but——"

"I confuse nothing," cried Petan indignantly, utterly bewildered. Then, seeing the real distress in Sylvia's face, hastened to ease the situation according to her lights. "Why, *chérie*, you need fear nothing. Monsieur, like you, has confided to me his love for you, as you did, long ago, for him. Among us three, all is at last known and open."

Sylvia gathered her wits together and looked pityingly at her dragon.

"My poor Petan," she said gently, "you are ill. Monsieur de Reizet, you will forget this absurd talk——"

But Petan considered their behaviour ridiculous. "Ill—I? Never. But your conduct should indeed sicken me, for my character abhors subtleties. Considering, Mademoiselle, that for three months I have listened to you repeat Monsieur's protestations of ardent love, and heard his adoring epistles read aloud, this sudden reserve and pretence wounds me profoundly, and is beyond my understanding. Surely, I have done enough to deserve——" Petan's voice broke and she turned her back upon the abashed pair and departed down the corridor. Of course Sylvia should have hurried after to explain and console, but how could she when Reizet held her fast by

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

one hand, and barred the way with six feet of solid bone and muscle?

"Mademoiselle," he stammered, "I beg of you not to run away. Don't be angry, I implore."

Sylvia feebly endeavoured to regain possession of her imprisoned hand.

"She—she—meant Jack," she said with an averted face.

"Of course she did, but what's the difference? It's all in the family. Oh! what can I say? Mademoiselle, it is contrary to my code to tell you how I love you before gaining your mother's consent—and please note that I do not say it. Petan, that pearl among women, has said it for me. All she said regarding me, you know is true, only she failed to tell it by half. She said you—loved me. Please—oh, my adored one——"

"It was Jack——"

"Admitted. But make believe it was I. When Petan told me how you prayed together—how dearly you loved me—I mean Jack, it sounded so heavenly sweet. Oh, Mademoiselle—*chérie. Mon Dieu, comme je t'aime!*"

Reizet's face was now close to Sylvia's as she stared out past its reflection in the window, at the flying trees and telegraph poles scudding by in the darkness.

"You said that nothing would induce you to marry an American girl——"

Reizet caught a glimpse of a shadowy dimple and held his breath.

"A wise man said that it was only a fool who never changes his mind."

"You said you wished I'd go home, and stay there."

"I do—to my home, and remain, forever and forever."

"There is mother."

"She'll be mine. I never had one, and I'll make her love me."

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"And the—land."

"What is mine, is yours."

"And the fence——"

"It shall come down. Oh, my precious one, my beloved, I'm so unworthy, but bless me—take my heart——"

Reizet gathered her into his arms. Sylvia felt his trembling lips on her closed eyes—her lips.

A stout gentleman appeared at the opposite end of the corridor, stared, whistled and vanished. Sylvia drew herself away and the light in Reizet's eyes was reflected in hers.

"What will Jack say?"

Reizet raised her hand to his lips. "Here we are, drawing into a station. We'll telegraph him."

"You'll have to explain to Petan."

"I'll explain nothing. She was correct in everything she said, and shall never know that certain trifling details were wrong. And please to remember, lovely one, that it was Petan, and not I, who proposed. I remind you of that fact, that nobody may say that my behaviour was open to criticism, from a French point of view. I shall ask your mother's consent to-morrow, and then yours, all over again. This was just a preliminary canter. Here we are at the station. Let us fly."

Fly they did along the dingy platform, dodging peasants burdened with children and packages, shouting trainmen who blew whistles seemingly without cause or effect. They had but three minutes to send their important message, and the indifferent official awoke to exasperating interest in Sylvia. However, this message was hurriedly written and paid for, signed by Sylvia.

"Your brother has changed his mind about marrying an American, for he is to marry thy—Sylvia."

As Reizet helped his fiancée to the train platform, she turned,

THE REWARD OF VIRTUE

consternation depicted on her glowing face. "We forgot to tell him not to tell."

"Never mind," laughed Reizet triumphantly, "he couldn't have helped telling the aunts, even if we had forbidden it."

Two hours later the party straggled through the wicket at the Gare de Lyon and on into the great hall, where customs officials inspect baggage. Suddenly Petan saw Jehan presenting a charming boy in Eton clothes and top hat to Mrs. Bradish and Sylvia. The latter acknowledged the introduction with polite indifference, but Petan was surprised to see the twain a few moments later, deep in animated conversation in a distant corner. Evidently, the boy was the "brother," and not slow to appreciate a lovely maid.

"You wretch," Sylvia was saying to Jack, "how dared you tell the aunts?"

"You didn't tell me not to!" cried Jack, whose cheeks and eyes glowed with happy excitement. "They are out there now, in their carriage. They came all the way across Paris to welcome you. Do come. Hurry."

Sylvia glanced hurriedly at her mother, absorbed in swearing that her trunks contained neither liquor nor tobacco, and followed Jack through the entrance and along the outer pavement under the high, glass roof, to where a high-swung, old-fashioned barouche waited.

Within, erect and elegant, sat the twins in fur-trimmed pelisses and antiquated bonnets, from which hung long lace veils. Little strings were neatly tied beneath their chins, and their hands, in two-buttoned white gloves, were eagerly extended, as the girl stood on the carriage step, while Jack executed a war dance of joy on the sidewalk.

"Oh, *chérie*," cried Aunt Cecile, "we came to meet you, to welcome you, to express our delight——"

"Our joy," echoed Aunt Agathe, patting Sylvia's free hand.

A SENTIMENTAL DRAGON

"Often have I thought that you and Jehan were made for each other."

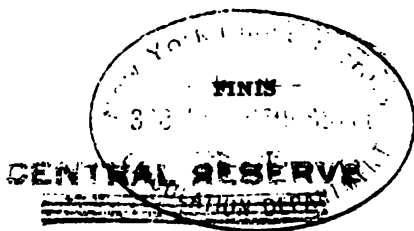
"You must love me," cried Sylvia. "I'll be so good. We'll all have a perfectly beautiful time together."

"Thou art adorable!" cried Cecile.

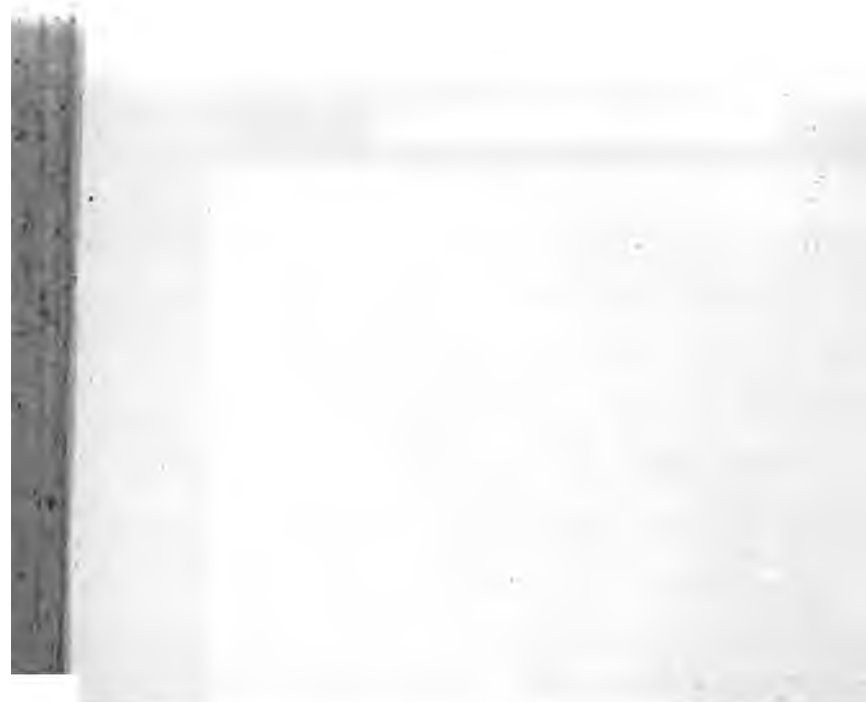
"And we shall adore and spoil thee," said Agathe.

"You darlings," cried Sylvia, putting up her face to be kissed. She felt their lips, like faded rose-leaves, touch her cheeks, and suddenly found tears in her eyes.

"She loved me, before any of you," boasted Jack. "But there is Paul, glaring at us. He'll have a jar when he hears the news. Come, Sylvia. Jehan is waiting to take you home!"









**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

[illegible]



—

